

HAMMERED AS GOLD

A poignant drama of human suffering and new hope
among the Evangelical Christians of Colombia

David M. Howard



Hammered as Gold

by David M. Howard

In HAMMERED AS GOLD David Howard skillfully unfolds the dramatic experience of the evangelical Christians in northern Colombia. He traces the growth over two decades of this South American mission, from infant church to present maturity.

The book opens with the tragic martyrdom of Ernest Fowler, killed by a band of guerrillas while working among the Colombian Indians. It then describes a mission beset by trouble at every turn, yet continually expanding its work, sometimes in totally unexpected ways.

In one period after another fraught with danger and with challenge, the young church is plunged into:

severe persecution
confusion and strife over speaking
in tongues
tremendous growth through
lay leadership

(continued on back flap)

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David M. Howard

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FIRST EDITION

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To my wife

PHYLLIS

whose purity of life and
radiance of love are to
me as "hammered gold"

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Foreword

It is one of the human infirmities that we take peremptory positions about things. We like (or dislike) labor unions, and so they are, in our minds, all good or all bad. We like (or dislike) Jews or Germans, and so when we read about something that one of these groups is doing, we have our opinions ready-made. We like (or dislike) Catholics or fundamentalists, or policemen or hippies, so we do not have to bother to think at all when issues arise involving these groups.

The topic God receives the same sort of handling from us. We think He is the invention of primitive minds, so we look upon the struggles of religious people with a slightly amused tolerance. Or we think He is a cad if He does exist ("How can an all-powerful being allow *this*?") and hence do not want to hear any more about the subject. Or we are convinced that He *is* Love, and dedicate ourselves to a fierce defense of everything that happens in the world, the idea being that if we grant the inexplicable, our God totters. It is enormously difficult to cope with more than one idea at a time.

Here is a book that undertakes that difficult task. The author could be excused for manipulating things so that we might get a bracing idea of "the work of God," since he (or any Christian,

for that matter) has a vested interest in the success of that work. Any data can be handled so that ambiguities are crowded out (cf. the Stalinist rewriting of history). Instead, we have the hurly-burly account of the experience of one group of Christians, the evangelical church in northern Colombia during two decades, which includes a great deal that hardly fits into any notion of God as always making things turn out right. It might well be entitled, *The Independence (or Unorthodoxy, or Caprices) of God.*

The wrong people die in the wrong way at the wrong time. Dismal failure greets well-intentioned efforts. Confusion and humbug beset what starts out as apparently a genuine visitation from God. Anger and sexual havoc muddy the water. Altogether, it is a damaging book—if it is understood that what is damaged is an icon, and not the living God known by Job and the prophets and manifest in the Son of Man.

At one point the author asks, "What constitutes 'the blessing God'?" What indeed. The experience of God's people down through the centuries (and, in this case, in northern Colombia) has been that the answer to that question is long in the learning. It will not be found in eager defenses of God's peculiar ways. The author goes on, "What right did we have to ask God for explanations of what He was doing with and in His people? When God finally spoke to Job out of the whirlwind, He never answered any of the questions which Job and his friends had raised. Rather, He simply asked more questions which Job could not answer."

The tale must speak for itself. There are anguish and bewilderment and sin, to be sure. But there are also joy and love and victory. Cleansing succeeds confessed sin in the church. Lay leadership springs up in the hinterland in almost apostolic proportions, and churches are brought into being in astonishing numbers. The long years of antagonism between the struggling non-Establishment churches in Colombia and the powerful

Church of Rome slowly dwindle as Christians on both sides of the line discover that their common faith in Jesus Christ is hardly the warrant for mutual fear and hostility.

For, as He always does everywhere, God calls the things that are not as though they were, and brings to nothing the things that are, and ordains strength out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, and makes valleys of dry bones live, and brings the dawn after the night, and clarity from confusion, and resurrection from the dead. Here is the story of one part of the Church that began to know Him as that sort of God.

THOMAS HOWARD

New York City

Preface

This is a personal book. It is not a history of the Latin America Mission nor of the church of Christ in Colombia. Rather it attempts to make personal observations of a young church maturing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In so doing, it raises some questions about the sovereignty of God in missionary work.

My participation covers the period of 1958 to 1968. But it would be impossible to understand this decade without the background of 1948 to 1957. The book, therefore, covers a twenty-year period.

The Spirit of God has been at work in Colombia. He has allowed the church to be purged by persecution. He has moved the church into a rapidly expanding outreach. He has given spiritual gifts for the edification of the church. And He has provided leaders from within the church.

The Devil has opposed this work at every turn. Persecution from without, confusion from within, and attacks on the leaders have all been part of his strategy to stifle the church.

I have felt like a spectator to this process. The growth of the church with the development of spiritual gifts and leadership has been spontaneous. It cannot be traced primarily to the work of

missionaries or even of national pastors. But as a spectator, I feel as though I have been invited behind the stage to watch the participants at close range. I have known a little of their struggles and triumphs, their heartaches and defeats, their hopes and ideals. And I have watched the drama unfolding before my eyes.

The repeated urgings of others whose opinion I respect (including the general directors of the Latin America Mission) have convinced me that this story should be told. The men and movements involved demonstrate how the Spirit of God has chosen to work in one part of the body of Christ.

The interpretation of these movements is personal. I have had to depend largely on my own notes and memory, which at times may differ from the notes or memory of others. Conflicting opinions have been taken into account, but the final interpretation is mine. Many individuals who participated in this drama will not find their names in these pages. This is no reflection on them. It is rather because I am not attempting to write an exhaustive history.

If the lessons learned by the church in northern Colombia, through tragedy, defeat, and triumph, can help the people of God elsewhere, I shall be grateful. If the lives and events recorded in this book can make the impact on others which they have made on me, I shall be rewarded.

DAVID M. HOWARD

Cartagena, Colombia

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Special thanks are due to my brother, Thomas Howard, and to my colleague, W. Dayton Roberts, for their editorial help and advice. Much of the structure of the book is based on counsel given by them.

I am deeply indebted to Mrs. Ernest L. Fowler for permitting me to read her personal diary kept at the time of her husband's death and for other information and writings which she gave me. Mrs. C. Ruben Lindquist (formerly Mrs. Harvey Hammond) placed at my disposal Ernest Fowler's diary written during the days when Harvey Hammond passed away, and for the use of this and permission to quote from it I am also very grateful.

Several secretaries in Colombia, Costa Rica, and the United

States have typed all or part of the manuscript at various stages of development, and these I also wish to thank: Vivian Gay, Marian Chapman, Miriam Hornstra, Anne Bailey, and May Koksma.

D.M.H.

But he knows the way that I take;
when he has tried me,
I shall come forth as gold.

JOB 23:10



Part 1



Chapter 1

“Thy Judgments are Right”

The afternoon shadows were lengthening on the sides of Eroca Canyon as the little band wound its way up the steep razorback ridges. Ernest Fowler, veteran missionary of thirty-two years in Colombia, was taking his family to spend the summer high up in the Andes near the border of Venezuela. His wife, Eve, rode muleback, as did ten-year-old Alison. John, age fourteen, trudged sturdily along beside his father, whose endurance on mountain trails was legendary. Fifteen-year-old Valerie and her Colombian friend, Elvira González, paused from time to time to admire a tiny flower hidden in the mountain foliage beside the trail.

“There it is!” called Ernie as they rounded a shoulder of the mountain and began the slight descent into the valley. The home of Carl and Joan Lehmann appeared as a welcome haven in the vastness of the surrounding mountains. The Lehmanns, young independent missionaries, were building a base from which to evangelize the Yukpa Indians (popularly known as northern Motilones). The Fowlers were to relieve them for the summer months, permitting the Lehmanns to get a much-needed vacation. For the third time in three decades Ernie Fowler had entered this range of mountains in an effort to penetrate the Yukpa

tribe, reduce their language to writing, and give them the Word of God. Although his two earlier efforts had ended in failure, this time Ernie had a tingling expectancy of success. Carl was a well-trained linguist whose technical ability complemented Ernie's broad background of experience among primitive peoples.

The Fowlers were warmly welcomed by their colleagues, and quickly settled into the Lehmann home, using a tent and hammocks to supplement the limited facilities of the unfinished house. Carl and Joan bade them good-by some days later and headed out on their vacation.

Lance, the Fowlers' sixteen-year-old son, was studying in the United States. After a few weeks with their small household alone in the mountains, the Fowlers' customary hospitality began to show itself. They invited Peter Clark, the ten-year-old son of missionary colleague Alick Clark, and my son, David Jr., age fourteen, to come and enjoy the mountain life with them during the summer months. On a trip down the mountain for supplies and mail, Ernie brought the boys back with him.

Days were filled with the necessary chores of living. Ernie and the boys hauled water and worked on the house. Eve and the girls cultivated the vegetable garden and did the cooking. The intricacies of language study of the unwritten Yukpa dialect, gestures to develop the friendship of the Indians, and occasional hikes up the ridges for the enjoyment of the children rounded out their activities.

On Wednesday, August 3, 1966, Ernie arranged for a "girls only" hike with Valerie and Elvira. Despite the protests of John and David, who wanted to go along, the trio took off for a day on the trails.

As the afternoon sun was sinking toward the tops of the ridges, Eve looked out the kitchen window to see a band of seven men, dressed partially as policemen and heavily armed, coming single file down the trail toward the house. Since guerrilla bands and contraband agents roam in the ranges between Colombia and

Venezuela, Eve was not surprised when these men identified themselves as police looking for communists. Inviting them into the house, she served them lemonade. She was just about to prepare them coffee as well when a sharp command rang out.

"All right, you kids! Everybody against the wall."

The barrels of rifles and pistols flashed. The sinister nose of a submachine gun stared at them. The click of a hammer told the children that they meant business.

The nudge of a pistol in the small of her back persuaded Eve that resistance of any sort would be fatal.

"Okay, get us your money and your jewels."

"But I don't have any jewels," Eve protested. The thrifty ways of a missionary on minimum salary plus a Puritan background where jewelry was largely an unnecessary luxury were concepts which a band of ruffians looking for loot could not fathom. Why else would North Americans be living in these inaccessible mountains if it were not to ferret out the gold and perhaps emeralds which lay hidden in the soil? Surely a simple gold wedding band could not be the only piece of jewelry a foreign woman would wear!

"But I can't even get the ring off her finger," complained the one who was straining at it. A long knife flashed out of its case, ready to slice off Eve's finger. A sudden commotion distracted the owner of the knife just in time, and Eve's hand remained intact.

"You don't mean to tell us this is *all* the money you have? Impossible!"

The relatively few bills couldn't possibly represent the wealth of a North American.

"Get the rest of the money—and quick—or we let you have it!"

It took all the pleading Eve could muster to persuade them that no more money or jewelry was anywhere to be found.

Tape recorders used for language analysis, cameras, food, and household items of all sorts were swept rudely into large burlap sacks. Machetes slashed at furniture, lamps, and other larger be-

longings. Language files were strewn across the floor and ink thrown on them.

In the meantime, the children stood horrified but stoically quiet against the wall, watching the pillage.

"All right! All you kids into that side room—on the double! If you so much as peek out, we're not responsible for what happens."

A machine gun posted at the door, and a rifleman at the window, gave credence to this last threat. The children were certain they were destined to be shot. However, none of them panicked. David would later write to a friend: "The thing that saved our lives throughout the whole time was our timidity. If we had ever made any protest, they would have shot the whole bunch of us. We prayed almost the whole time we were in there, not that we'd be saved, but for forgiveness of sins, so as to be ready to come into His presence. I became quite happy at the thought of seeing Jesus in less than half an hour."

Suddenly the door of the side room opened, and Eve, haggard and pale, was thrust in with the children. "Get in there and keep your trap shut." Eve could scarcely restrain herself from hysterical sobbing, but she managed a wan smile and put her finger to her lips as she dropped exhausted to the floor.

Eve later wrote in her diary: "When Johnny, who was bossing us all into silence, would let me, I prayed in a loud whisper that the Dear Lord would cleanse us from all known and unknown sin and help us to die as we ought to, as Christians, bravely—thinking that any minute they would machine-gun us or worse still, set fire to the cans of white gas and kerosene and gasoline that were there."

The voices of the men then indicated they were heading up to the nearby tent, which they ransacked with equal abandon. By 5:00 P.M. their voices began to fade away down the trail, and to the beleaguered family it seemed that they might be leaving for good. Wisdom called for remaining out of sight until they could be sure, however.

Throughout the ordeal Eve kept worrying about Ernie, Valerie, and Elvira. She fully expected that they would return to a house in ashes with the charred remains of five bodies. A pattern of guerrilla bands in the Colombian mountains is often to plunder and rape, then kill and burn. She did not expect that Ernie would find them alive.

Suddenly a shot rang out, followed quickly by two more shots somewhere down the trail.

"They've shot Daddy and the two girls," groaned Eve as she crouched beside the children in the little room.

After a few moments of horrified silence, they heard the screams of Valerie and Elvira, who were heading for the house. Fear that some bandits might still be lurking nearby kept Eve and the children hiding in the room, until they heard Valerie shouting, "They shot Daddy! They shot Daddy!"

Running into the house, the two girls found the shambles but no sign of life.

"They've all been killed!"

"Hush, Valerie! Are there any men still around?"

John's hoarse whisper came through the wall, and the girls realized that they were not alone. Still fearful, the family crept out of their cramped room and began to share with each other what had happened. Breathlessly, Valerie related how the men had lied to Ernie that they were policemen looking for communists. They asked for his shotgun, which he used for hunting, and his machete, with which he hacked open the mountain trails. When he had turned these over in good faith, asking for a receipt, one man whipped out a pistol and shot him point blank in the face. As he fell another shot was pumped into his back, and a third was fired into the bushes.

After mouthing some obscenities to the girls, but miraculously not harming them, the men proceeded on down the trail.

"Valerie, are you sure Daddy is dead?"

"Yes. I turned him over and his mouth was full of blood and his eyes rolled back."

The incredible horror of what had happened was beginning to dawn on them.

By this time a few Indians had gathered at the house and stood by in stony-faced bewilderment.

"Would some of you Indians help us by bringing his body back here to the house?"

Negative grunts were the only response. Then Eve remembered the Indian custom that only an immediate relative can touch the body of a dead man. So there was no hope that any of them could be persuaded to bring Ernie's body.

"David, will you go? What about you, John?"

After some hesitation John finally responded, "Well, I'll go if David will."

David later described the next steps as follows: "Mrs. Fowler stayed with [Alison], and the rest of us took a ladder, a canvas tarp, and a towel. I went ahead with the towel. When I got there, I was sick. I wrapped the towel around his head and waited for the others to catch up. There was a ring of Indians around him, but no one would touch him. . . . When Johnny got there, he flopped down on him and sobbed. . . . We got the ladder ready, with the tarp on it, and rolled Mr. Fowler over onto it. When we tried to pick him up, we hardly could. I asked one of the Indians if he would help us carry him. Nothing doing. So we went along slowly, stopping to rest every thirty yards. When we got home we put him under a tree and started digging his grave. But we got too tired and decided to sleep in the field by the grave."

No one wanted to spend the night in the house, the scene of their recent horrors. Instead, they bedded down in blankets spread in the bushes near the body. But in the blackness every snap of a twig or rustle of a leaf would startle them. They found it impossible to relax or sleep.

At one point they saw a light coming down the trail. Thinking it might be the bandits returning to kill all of them, they dived for hiding behind some rocks in the bushes. It turned out to be a

friendly Indian from a nearby village. Some moments later another light was seen coming from the direction in which the murderers had fled. This time they did not wait to find out who it was. They snatched up their blankets and frantically scrambled up the mountain, stumbling in the darkness until they reached the nearest Indian village a half hour away. Here they obtained permission to remain for the night. About 9:30 P.M. John, mustering great courage, decided to climb with an Indian two hours farther up the mountain to seek help from their nearest Colombian neighbor, Jesús Pérez, a fine Christian.

On hearing the story, Jesús sprang into action. He sent his oldest son down the mountain to inform friends in the town of Valledupar, about eight hours away, while he and John returned to Eve and the children. At dawn Jesús continued on down to the valley to make sure help was on the way.

All day Thursday the bewildered group remained near the body of their loved one.

Eve wrote in her diary of that day: "We dug the grave. By spurts the work got done. David and John began and Elvira did some, and when the afternoon came, John alone got some more done because he wanted it six feet deep. . . . In the late afternoon they got some help from one of the neighbors there, and about halfway down they ran into a large hard sandstone that impeded their work no end. No one could budge it, and it lay right in the upper middle of the hole. I thought we would have to just lay Ernest in as it was, but David protested that he would not be comfortable. So we went at it again to try to move it out or break it. No one could. . . . Finally Johnny got mad and got down into that hole, swung that pick high in an arch over his head and shoulder, and finally split it open and cracked it up. . . . I think we never attained those six feet—five maybe. No one measured it. But they were tired and it looked good to me only because I felt we were at least ready to lay our dear one away there. . . . Who of us would have thought of his lying buried there—that

Saturday before when he was bent over double trying to harvest those dumb old navy beans. . . . For now he lies there in that very bean patch."

They had eaten nothing since the previous day, as the bandits had stolen most of their food and no one had any appetite to swallow what little was left to them. Eve continued in her diary: "No one arrived as we had thought by four o'clock—five—six—and darkness again fell with us all so nervous and afraid and distraught. It became worse with every ray of light that faded, leaving it pitch black and so quiet there in those deep hills."

They prepared to spend another night alone, putting cots and blankets in a nearby tent. Then Eve gathered the children and read from the *Daily Light* (which David had brought to her from his few belongings that had not been stolen) the portion on "Bereavement." Her diary continued:

"So that night with the last fading light (we had no candle) we gathered around those cots and around the Word and tried to sing. '*Tesoro Incomparable. Jesús amigo fiel, Refugio del que buye del Adversario cruel*' (Incomparable treasure, Jesus faithful friend, Refuge of him who flees the cruel Adversary). This has been a favorite of mine all my life. . . . But that evening it took all seven of us to keep it going. John, David, Elvira, Alison and Peter kept it going when I could not, and when they could not, I did. We got through it. I read all the portions night and morning in the *Daily Light*. How pregnant and poignant and pungent those portions really are! Surely He knows, surely He permits certain things, terrible things, to happen! Surely! Then we prayed, David, John, Elvira and I, and then it was suddenly pitch dark and only the sounds of the night things, crickets and bugs, could be heard. We were nervous and full of apprehension and finally bedded down, again, far too early."

Shortly after noon on Thursday, the news had reached English missionary Alick Clark, an old colleague of Ernie, in Valledupar. He immediately secured the help of five policemen and headed

for the mountains with Jesús Pérez, not pausing to rest until late that night when he arrived at the scene of the crime. Darkness and rain hindered an official investigation, so the burial was postponed until morning. By that time the body had been exposed for thirty-six hours, thus making a detailed examination by the police impossible.

At dawn on Friday, August 5, Alick removed Ernie's wedding ring. Alick then presided at a simple ceremony as he committed his colleague's body, wrapped only in the tarpaulin, to the shallow grave.

The group cleaned up what was left of personal belongings in the house and retrieved the valuable language files that had been scattered around in the debris. Since they had not eaten in two days, Eve cooked two chickens, which they ate in the open air, and by noon they started down the trail to Valledupar.

The first news of the tragedy had reached me in Medellín on Thursday at 5:00 P.M. I flew immediately on Friday morning to Valledupar, not knowing what to expect. The report by telephone was fragmentary, and it was not clear if Eve and the children had also been killed or harmed. Ross Clemenger, Field Director of the Evangelical Union of South America, who knew the area well, kindly accompanied me.

By Friday noon when we arrived in Valledupar news was still fragmentary. Borrowing a jeep from a missionary, we dashed toward the mountains. Upon reaching the town of Codazzi about 2:00 P.M., I ran into the police station to ask for further news. They informed me that a squad of twenty-five soldiers was on its way to pursue the bandits, but they had no news of the fate of Eve and the children. At 3:00 P.M. we reached the foot of the trail into the mountains at the village of Casacará. Here we overtook the soldiers. But again no more news was available.

By this time I was considering the probability that others might have been killed or wounded. It had been nearly forty-eight hours since the murder, and I could not understand why

the family had not yet reached the valley. I had been over that trail before with Ernie and knew that, while it was rugged and steep, crossing rivers and ridges, the family certainly should have been out by now.

I joined the soldiers hiking into the mountains but soon left them far behind in my anxiety to get up to the scene as quickly as possible. For the next hour as I pushed desperately up that trail alone, my heart was in turmoil. Had my fourteen-year-old son and the other friends been killed? I did not even know how to pray intelligently. How does one pray for another if he is not sure whether that one is dead or alive? I recalled two verses which I had read that very morning as I was flying from Medellín to Valledupar. The first was, "We know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. 8:26). The Lord seemed to be saying that the Spirit of God Himself was praying for us—for Eve and her children and my son David, if they were still alive, and for me when I didn't know how to pray. The second verse was: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee" (Isa. 26:3).* That afternoon on that rugged mountain trail this verse became more real to me than ever before.

About 5:00 P.M. I came over a rise in the trail and met a Colombian boy leading two mules. I was just about to ask what news he had from Eroca when I heard a shout, "Dad!"

There was David coming along the path, followed some yards back by the rest of the party. It was a haggard little caravan, but a welcome sight to my eyes. David and I embraced. Then he rapidly blurted out the essential facts of what had happened. I stepped over to Eve. Words are useless on such occasions, so I simply laid my hand on her shoulder and stood quietly while she wept silently for a few moments. Then I gave them all chocolate

* Scripture quotations in this book are from the Authorized King James Version and from *The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version.

and raisins, and we continued the journey together to the foot of the mountain.

As I walked beside the mule on which Eve was riding, she poured out the details of their nightmare. Then she spoke of Ernie and summed up his life by saying, "Ernest was always ready to step aside for those in a hurry to get ahead, and step back to help and encourage those who were lagging behind."

We picked up the jeep at the foot of the mountain and drove back to Valledupar. Sleep did not come easily that night. The terrifying details of the ordeal through which Eve and the children had passed kept racing through my mind. But far more penetrating and disturbing was the question, "Why?" Why did it have to be Ernie, a humble and unselfish servant of the Lord? Why such a senseless murder as the tragic end to a long struggle to evangelize the Indians? No answers were given, but one phrase from Psalm 119:75 stood out in the darkness of that hour, "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." Whatever the reasons (and these were shrouded in mystery), God's ways were right and were done in His faithfulness.

Finally I drifted off to sleep wondering about God and about Ernie—this man who died so ignominiously in the mountains of Colombia, so far from his boyhood ranch in Montana. What had he done? What did he leave for posterity? And how could God's will encompass so shabby a farewell?

Chapter 2

From Montana to Motilones

It was Friday night. The building of the National Bible Institute in New York City was nearly deserted. The students were out on weekend activities, and only a few employees including a watchman and the elevator boy were on duty. Some elevator repairmen were working in one of the shafts. The elevator boy had walked to the second floor on an errand, intending to return to the main floor by taking the extra elevator which was not normally in use. He opened the door to the shaft, stepped in . . . and two seconds later found himself sitting on the basement floor, having descended without benefit of the elevator which was on an upper floor! Although shaken up, he was not seriously hurt, and was soon rescued after calling for help.

Thus Ernest Fowler, with his inimitable sense of humor, would recount one of his experiences as a student in Bible School. He was one of the most accident-prone individuals I have ever known. Somehow this seemed to mark his whole life. One of his boyhood chums, Ivan Pulis, who grew up with Ernie on the ranches of Montana, says that if there was ever an accident to be had, it was Ernie who had it! In the more serious realms of life, Ernie symbolically was forever falling down elevator shafts. Few

persons knew more about struggle with the powers of evil, about setbacks, disappointments, and failures than he did.

Born in Pender, Nebraska, on November 24, 1907, the youngest of four children of a Methodist pastor, Ernie grew up in the rigors of western ranching. His father moved to Montana when Ernie was two years old, in order to witness for Christ in a needy frontier region. The discipline of a godly home laid a strong foundation in his life. Rugged work on the family ranch put sinewy muscles on his lean frame and gave him the stamina he would need for pioneer missionary work in Colombia.

With deep respect for his godly father, Ernie used to amuse us with stories of his discipline. He recalled that during high school years, a town dance, which was an important community event, was being anticipated. He and his brothers secretly hoped to go even though dancing had been forbidden in their home. Several weeks before the dance their father called them together.

"Boys, I think the time has come for you to make your own decisions on some things. I have taught you basic principles; now I want you to exercise your own judgment. I'm going to let you decide if you should go to the town dance. You can talk it over and let me know what you decide."

Among themselves the boys immediately decided that they would go to the dance. The weeks went by. Nothing further was said until a day or two before the big event. Then their father called them together again.

"All right, boys. What have you decided about the dance?"

"Well, Father," the boys began, "we've decided that we will go to the dance . . ."

"*Oh no you don't!*" interrupted their father, his heavy fist pounding the table. "I thought you were old enough to make your own decisions, but I see you're not. I'll have to make it for you. You *don't* go to the dance!"

In spite of youthful disappointments of this sort, which he could laugh about in later years, Ernie came to understand true

godliness not only by what his parents taught him but also by their lives.

On a sheet of paper found in Ernie's desk after his death he recorded his testimony in these words:

While we were still on the farm the Lord met me in the midst of unbelief and rebellion and brought me to personal faith in the finished work of His Son. Shortly after, I enrolled in the Denver Bible Institute in order to learn to witness. Toward the close of my first year there, stirring appeals made by Dr. Isaac Page of the China Inland Mission for pioneers for the Tibetan highlands were used of the Lord to bring me to yield my life for witness among the tribes of South America.

Ernie graduated from Denver Bible Institute, which is now Rockmont College, in 1933. His senior thesis was on "Love," a characteristic exemplified throughout his life in relationships with fellow missionaries and nationals.

On his birthday of 1934, Ernie sailed from New York in the company of Mr. and Mrs. William E. Thompson as newly appointed candidates with the South America Indian Mission. In a personal letter dated September 4, 1966, Thompson recalls some of his early impressions and experiences with Ernie.

It wasn't long before we were impressed with Ernie's innate kindness and consideration for others. He had a singleness of purpose and that was to be well-pleasing to the Lord.

The day after we left New York, I had this notation in my diary: "Sunday, November 25: The service was held in the music room at ten-thirty a.m. The pianist of the orchestra played for us. About ten were present beside us three. Ernest spoke on Christ calming the sea."

Ernie's first bit of service on Colombian soil (probably) took place in Cartagena, "Ernest gave a gospel portion to a

British sailor who took us to the cathedral (12/3/34)! . . ."

Another thing that impressed me during those early days was that Ernie did a lot of personal work. Not involved conversation but a word here, a tract, quoting of verses of Scripture and his smile. . . .

Ernie from the beginning had a heart for the Indians. *Sunday, January 20, 1935*, "Ernest spoke this morning on the Spies and their entering the promised land. He said we were in somewhat the same situation, for we are on the threshold of Indian territory, and we contemplate in the near future survey trips into their land."

Ernie was eager to find out all he could about the Indians, and although at present the first few trips might seem to be short and easy, yet then they represented something quite different. We were the only missionaries at the time in the State of Magdalena, our knowledge of Spanish was still meager and every step to be taken represented unknown territory.

Ernie and the Thompsons made Santa Marta their headquarters. They plunged into the study of Spanish, which Ernie mastered to an unusual degree. His fluency in Spanish was well beyond that of the average missionary. Thompson's diary records their first contacts with Indians in the Guajira peninsula of northeastern Colombia, principally with the Guajiros and the Aruaks. They were also praying about reaching the Yukpas in the high Andes along the Colombia-Venezuela border.

In 1940, when Ernie returned to the United States on his first furlough, he changed his mission membership to the Evangelical Union of South America. He returned to Colombia in 1942. His burden for the Indians was still heavy. In company of Harvey Hammond of the EUSA and missionary Alick Clark, he prepared to reach the Yukpas. Alick had been working in that territory since 1930 and was able to give Ernie excellent orientation.

In 1943 these three men undertook an arduous trip over the Sierra de Perijá onto the eastern slopes of the Andes. They hoped to contact the primitive Indians who at that time, if not hostile, were certainly unfriendly. Ernie kept a diary of the trip up into the high Andes with a group of Indians who went along as carriers and to help them cut the trail.

Friday the 12th [Feb. 12, 1943] We only made about nine miles that day, and made camp near a fall in the river. . . . The Indians toasted some fish they had on a triangular frame of green sticks over the fire, and we drank some more of our "tamwi" of toasted corn. They asked us to sing, so we sat or lay in our hammocks under the stars, while they stretched out on piles of leaves in the flickering light of their fires, and sang in Spanish and English what hymns of praise and petition that came to our minds praying that someday they might come to an understanding of the love of Him of Whom we were singing and of these things so precious to us. We passed the night there in the forest under the stars and in the morning began the real ascent.

Feb. 17. This has been a hard day and everyone is very tired. . . . Last night we slept on top of the divide with no water to do any cooking, our beds being laid out on heavy ferns. . . . It was pretty cold, and heavy dew fell on us in the morning. We had a good time of prayer before we had gone to sleep and in the A.M. a brief time. With a cold breakfast and only a little water out of our canteens we started out. To our disappointment the way was so blocked by heavy brush at first we spent about the whole morning "tirando machete" (swinging a machete) and that on a pretty empty stomach and dry throats.

Feb. 20. . . . We started out at 7:00 with high hopes of making a good long march. As soon as we got to the top of

the first high rise we ran into dense brush trees and heavy fern, so that we literally had to cut our way foot by foot hour after hour from then on.

Feb. 22. Day before yesterday we began our attempt to get down the mountain to reach Irapa. Alick had had chills when we were up there in that damp atmosphere and wasn't feeling too well. Harvey was having trouble with his stomach and Friday night had some fever, and all of us had various sores and cuts. . . . We waited some time Saturday (?) morning for the mists to clear so we could see our way down off the mountain to Irapa, but God in His own great wisdom for some reason did not permit, and finally we started out realizing we could not stay on there under such conditions. In an attempt to get down we encountered a precipice and in the mist it seemed like we couldn't find any proper way. Finally we did start down a very steep place and soon were introduced into the most dank, moss hung, perpetually wet jungle mess I have yet seen, passing under the roots of great trees hung with moss, cutting our way . . . down, down, down through the mess.

After they finally reached Irapa, they were harassed by illness, bad weather, and every conceivable inconvenience. It seemed that nature itself was opposing them. Ernie wrote:

Feb. 28, Sunday. The week that has passed . . . has been a nightmare in one sense, yet days in which the Lord also gave rich blessings and grace. We had hardly gotten the tent up . . . when Alick came down hard with fever and chills not to get up again for some time and to come very near death's door. Then Harvey was down again hard with bad stomach, fever, and what not, and for 3 or 4 days neither was able to stir out of the tent except for absolute necessity, Alick not at all—in fact at one time unable to raise himself in bed. . . . It was

truly a crisis. Alick on one side groaning and suffering intensely, growing each day thinner and weaker; on one side Harvey flushed, gasping, and tossing all night long as well as day—and like pulling teeth to get either one to eat or rather drink enough food to keep them in any degree of strength.

The water supply was scarce and contaminated. Each day Ernie would creep, on hands and knees, to the waterhole so as not to stir up the settled mud. With great care he would scrape away the green scum from the surface and dip out cupfuls of water for his fever-ridden companions.

One day, under what appeared to be a perfect blue sky, he was reaching for the water. Suddenly, the skies opened in an incredible cloudburst that completely riled the water, making it undrinkable again. Almost immediately Ernie realized that they were in a life-and-death struggle with the principalities and powers, with the rulers of the darkness of this world. He stood to his feet, shook his fist at the sky, and audibly rebuked the demonic forces. The words of Martin Luther, who knew much about the struggles against darkness, came to his mind, and he sang aloud:

And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo, his doom is sure;
One little word shall fell him.

Ernie decided that their only hope of survival was for him to make an emergency trip out of the mountains to get medicines,

food, and help. He began preparations for Clark and Hammond to be able to care for themselves during his absence. But it was too late. On March 6 Ernie wrote, referring to events of March 5:

I began preparations for the journey. Alick and I both with much apprehension as to my going on account of the difficulty of Alick's handling him alone, etc. etc., but it seemed our only chance to save him."

Then, after further descriptions of chills and vomiting by Harvey Hammond, Ernie continued his diary:

Suddenly I noticed him looking at me as if he wanted me to come over (was losing speech again) and I hurried to his side. He reached up, put his arm around my neck as I bent over to ask what he wanted, and saying, "I want to sit up." He pulled at my neck and I helped him sit up. Again I braced his back with my knee . . . and held his head in the crook of my arm. The effort of sitting up seemed to be a tremendous drain on him and his heart was pounding and breath coming hard. Thought maybe he would be more restful lying down so tried to let him down but he held himself rigid indicating that he wanted to stay as he was. I held him in my arms that way his breathing becoming more and more difficult, 'til finally at 5:05 he passed away, went Home to rest and comfort without the hard journey over Irapa Mt. we had so dreaded for him in his weakened condition.

Ernie then described the reactions of the Indians and the search for a suitable burial place:

We found in just a short time a regular rock tomb, a cavity just the right size down under a huge rock with a tree entwined about it—just deep enough a depression inside so that he could be well covered and then the mouth stopped

up with stones—almost as if it had been hewn out for the purpose, except that I had to work for two or three hours chipping away stone along the floor of the entrance in order for his body to pass. With the Indians' help we carried him in a hammock slung from a pole down to this natural tomb and there we laid him away—our hearts heavy indeed in a way, but at the same time with certain peace that God gives to His own and somehow feeling that in regard to the Indian work it was a case of the corn of wheat falling into the ground and dying that there might be rich fruit.

March 11. Harvey's birthday!—I went down and finished up a few odds and ends about the tomb this afternoon—closing the entrance, etc. and finished carving his name, date of his going home and the reference "San Juan 12:24" (St. John 12:24) on the trunk of the tree that has its roots locked about the rock. . . . It will have been a happy birthday indeed—free from all suffering and in the presence of the Lord.

From March 6 to March 28 Ernie's diary records one long continued struggle. First he had to help Alick Clark to recuperate from his illness. Then he persuaded the Indians to assist them in cutting a trail up and over the mountains. They battled the elements and met with frustrating delays as they wound their way back into civilization. It was Ernie who had to inform Georgiena Hammond, with her two-year-old son, that her husband had been buried three weeks earlier in a rock cave in Irapa. Ernie could not know then that twenty-three years later his own body would be buried on the western slopes of that range, with Alick presiding at his funeral.

In 1946, after twelve years of serving the Lord in Colombia as a bachelor, Ernie married Eve Philpott, newly arrived missionary under the EUSA. Ernie was now field leader for the Mission,

even though his heart was still with the Indians. He accepted administrative work when it was given to him, but he always yearned for direct contact with people. He chafed under the frustrations often inherent in administrative leadership. He once said to me in his typical rancher's style, "When it comes to administration, I don't know where to grab the beast: by the head or by the tail!"

After marriage, Ernie and Eve, Mr. and Mrs. Alick Clark, and Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Hanes settled in Eroca Canyon high up in the mountains among the Yukpa Indians. Friendships were established and progress was made in language analysis. A few of the Yukpas, including old chief Papa Marte, indicated some understanding of the gospel and a desire to follow Christ.

But once again Ernie was destined for a setback.

While the Fowlers were on furlough in 1949 a wave of violence that was to hinder missionary work for a decade swept over Colombia. The house in Eroca where the Fowlers and Clarks had lived was sacked. Most of their personal belongings were destroyed or stolen. It became impossible for them to return to that area.

In 1951 the Fowlers set sail again for Colombia, this time independently, having withdrawn from the EUSA for personal reasons. Destination was uncertain, but they were sure that God still had a place for them in the land of their adoption.

Then came one of those circumstances where the hand of God moves the destinies of men. The captain of the ship heading for Barranquilla changed his course on the high seas and put into the port of Cartagena. Ernie and Eve did not know what this might mean for them. They went to the headquarters of the Latin America Mission to greet them and to ask for help in getting their shipment through customs while they decided on their next step.

Unknown to the Fowlers, the LAM missionaries, who were

desperate for more help in those years when no new recruits were allowed into the country, had been praying urgently for reinforcements. They eagerly invited the Fowlers to remain there until they found God's will for their future location.

William Lester, LAM Field Director, initiated correspondence with General Director Kenneth Strachan about the Fowlers' joining the LAM. As a result Ernie and Eve became members in January, 1952.

From the outset Ernie made clear his burden for the Indians, but circumstances continued to make it impossible to return to that work. Before long the LAM administration recognized Ernie's gifts of leadership and personal dealings with people. In 1953 he was asked to assume the position of Field Director when the Lesters returned to the States.

Thus there would begin for him a new work, one that would make him an integral part of a maturing young church.

Chapter 3

“Love Seeketh Not Her Own”

F

rom 1953 to 1958 Ernie Fowler

served as Field Director for the Latin America Mission in Colombia. This was one of the most difficult periods in the history of the Mission on that field. The violence and persecution were exacting a toll on the national church. The ranks of the Mission were slowly being depleted, as the normal losses due to health, transfer, or other reasons occurred with no possibility of replacements. Government restrictions on visas made the entrance of new missionaries impossible.

As the Mission family became smaller, work loads increased and pressures built up. The possibilities of friction were greater. A maximum of tact, wisdom, patience, and perseverance was required of the Field Director.

Ernie, who possessed these gifts, remained unruffled in the midst of potentially explosive situations. At one point there were only twelve LAM missionaries left in Colombia. The possibility of the entire work dissolving under the pressure lurked as a constant danger.

In retrospect the Latin America Mission can appreciate the importance of that period in the total development of the Mission. Had the LAM failed to hold together its local field in

Colombia, the Mission would have been in a poor position to give leadership in Evangelism-in-Depth on the nation-wide, continent-wide, and now world-wide scale to which this movement has grown. Evangelism-in-Depth is a concept of total evangelism developed by Kenneth Strachan. It is based on the proposition that "the success of any movement is in direct proportion to the ability of that movement to mobilize its entire membership in constant propagation of its beliefs." How could a mission which had failed to keep its own house in order hope to help other missions in total mobilization on a local or national scale? Ernie was the man who kept the house in order in Colombia.

He accepted administrative leadership as God's will for him at that time. He made it clear, however, to Kenneth Strachan that he would gladly step aside at the first opportunity to replace him. He insisted that his original calling to the Indians was still primary and he wanted to be released for this work as quickly as possible.

I recall the Annual Mission Meetings held in Costa Rica in 1953. My wife, Phyllis, and I were just finishing language school, so these were our first annual meetings. Ernie Fowler was invited over from Colombia as the Bible teacher for the week. This was also his first time in Costa Rica with the LAM family. He was introduced at the opening meeting as the new Field Director from Colombia. His first words were something like this: "I'd like to say at the outset that the greatest need of the LAM in Colombia today is for a Field Director!"

In 1954 Kenneth Strachan called Phyllis and me into his office to discuss the possibility of our transferring to Colombia. (We were then working in the Seminario Bíblico Latinoamericano in San José.) He told us of Ernie's burden for the Indian work and his desire to be released for this. He suggested that we might provide some relief in administration so that Ernie could eventually return to the Indians.

Shortly thereafter the Mission authorities assigned us to

Colombia. We applied for visas. An interminable three years elapsed, and still we waited for them to be processed. Then came the overthrow of General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla in May, 1957. The new government of Colombia took a more liberal position toward Protestant missionaries. Violence and persecution had reached their zenith. This marked the beginning of the end of that tragic period.*

In July, 1957, I was in Colombia on a brief visit. Ernie suggested we go to Bogotá together to see what we could do about getting the visas approved. We spent two days in the capital, contacting various government offices. We also visited the National Museum where Ernie gave me a guided tour of the section on Indian culture of Colombia. His eyes lit up with a new fervor as he found himself transported into the culture of the people he loved. When he saw some photographs on display of Yukpa Indians whom he knew personally, his excitement knew no bounds.

Finally, in September, 1957, the LAM was granted seven visas for new missionaries to enter the country. More followed in subsequent months—and the great rush was on! The LAM leadership, realizing how starved for reinforcements the Colombia field had been for nearly a decade, poured all the help possible into the field.

In August, 1958, following our first furlough, our family arrived in Cartagena. Ernie was twenty years my senior both in age and in experience on the mission field. Yet I, with only one term of service behind me, had been asked by the Mission to take over his position as Field Director. This was a situation fraught with potential jealousies or hurt feelings. But from the day when Ernie began to orient me for my new work, it was clear that no such feelings were present.

Eve Fowler had already left on furlough with their children, but Ernie stayed on with me. He lived in our home for two

* See Chaps. 6 and 7.

months. We never had a guest who became so naturally a part of the family. Our relationship was smooth. It was evident that he was genuinely delighted with this relief.

When this change was being considered Ernie wrote to Kenneth Strachan concerning the new administrative arrangements as follows:

First of all, let me say that we have no axe to grind or no mental blocks on the matter (as far as I know!). We are willing to fit in wherever we can be most useful. It has been a pleasure to have been of service in this capacity these years, in spite of the pressures and problems and although we have felt very unworthy and inadequate to serve in this particular capacity. . . . From my outlook it is not a major problem that [Dave] be considered my boss on any given or on every level, and it might clear the air of the anomaly of a "you first my dear Gaston—no, you my dear Alfonse" situation of shared or assigned area of responsibility. . . .

In any case I will be glad to be on tap as counsellor or in any advisory capacity in those realms where my experience and capacity are of value, whether there is any official capacity or title or not. I would rather have Dave feel it is there when he wants it or needs it, than to have him feel he is under pressure on a point of deference or seniority. . . .

It seems to me in a matter like this we are in danger of mincing around the problem out of respect to what may be relatively minor considerations when the practical strategy is a little decisive clearing of the decks for action.

In reply to that letter Kenneth Strachan wrote:

Ernie, I can't tell you how much we all appreciated the whole tenor and spirit of your letter. It was the sort of letter that made me want to go out into the hall and read aloud to

anybody that might come by and say, "This is the kind of missionaries we have in the LAM."

Upon return from furlough in August, 1959, Ernie was named head of the Church Department. He became coordinator of the Mission activities related to the autonomous Association of Evangelical Churches of the Caribbean. Their children's schooling plus other factors still made it unfeasible for them to return to live among the Indians. For the next few years Ernie dedicated himself to the Colombians in the church work. His love of people was one of his greatest assets.

One morning he and I were chatting in his office in a large house in Cartagena. My back was to the door, but I heard someone enter the hallway. Immediately, Ernie's face brightened. He became completely oblivious of me as he warmly greeted the person behind me. I would have guessed it was a long lost friend. I turned to see that it was doña Rosa, the little cleaning lady who had come for her daily chore of sweeping the offices.

Another time he and I were walking down a narrow street in Cartagena when we passed a forlorn beggar sitting on the curb. Ernie spun around and went back, greeting him as though they had been friends of long standing.

"Well, how goes the fight today? How are you making out?"

It was not the aloof dropping of a coin into a beggar's cup. It was rather the greeting which sprang from a heart thinking of the other person and his needs. He kept me waiting as he conversed with this outcast who probably never had been greeted as an equal by an educated man, let alone a North American. Words were backed up with action as he gave him some coins and then rejoined me.

Long exposure to the elements, first as a farmer then as a pioneer missionary, gave Ernie a weatherbeaten appearance. His sense of humor accentuated the creases in his leathery face.

He was a peerless storyteller. One of the delights of my mis-

sionary career was to travel alone with him in dugout canoes or along forest trails, and to prod him into recounting his experiences. Stories of the ranch, of his travels in every conceivable conveyance in Colombia, of contacts with primitive Indians, or of mishaps and accidents were always told with contagious humor.

One day he and I set out down the San Jorge River in a canoe with a group of Indians and two Colombians. We had been visiting in an Indian home for a week and were now returning to civilization. The Indians constructed a raft of balsa trees. As luck would have it, they tied Ernie's knapsack and hammock to the raft and placed my belongings in the canoe with us.

About an hour downriver the raft was swept into a deep rapids which we were bypassing in the canoe. The two men on the raft quickly lost control, and the raft overturned with Ernie's belongings still tied on. It remained in that position for five minutes while the Indians, struggling against the current, eased it over to shore and turned it upright again. Ernie's clothes, hammock, camera, notebooks, and Bible were all soaked.

That night we slept in the home of some believers in Juan José. Since Ernie's hammock was still soaked, he decided to sleep on the floor of a loft along with a dozen Indians who were there. So he climbed up and squeezed in between them for the night.

The next morning as he came down the notched log that served as a ladder, I greeted him, "Well, Ernie, how was the night?"

"Oh, I had a pretty good night. The Indian on my right kept digging his knee into my back all night; the Indian on my left dug his elbow into my ribs most of the night; the little boy on the other side of him was vomiting up worms all night; and"—pulling up his shirt to show his body was covered with bites—"the fleas had an active night of it. But"—and here his face creased up in a grin—"outside of that I had a fine night!"

On another occasion Ernie and I had traveled all of one day by

jeep, twelve hours of a second day by canoe, and then prepared to walk with heavy loads on our backs for a day and a half through dense jungle. I was in the final stages of recuperation from a case of hepatitis which had left me weak for months. Upon seeing the load I would be carrying, Ernie insisted on strapping my jungle hammock to his own pack, thus relieving me and adding nearly ten pounds to his own load. He laughed away my protests, and carried this for me.

Twice we spent nights in huts of Colombians. The first night was in the jungle in the only hut for miles around, and the second night on a farm along the river. On neither occasion did a natural opportunity for witnessing present itself. Yet both times, before retiring, Ernie spoke to the head of the household about Christ and what He could do for each of them. They listened with expressionless faces. But for Ernie it was an obligation to share the best thing he had to offer, having once accepted their hospitality.

Chapter 4

“Faithful in That Which is Least”

With the growth of the churches, Ernie's role as coordinator, or liaison man, between the LAM and the national church became increasingly important. Kenneth Strachan had outlined this for Ernie as follows:

As we discussed the future of the work in Colombia and the different alternatives suggested regarding your future ministry . . . , it seemed to us that about the most important job to be done there in Colombia was in connection with the entire program of the churches, involving not only the promotion of the work in the churches itself, but also adequate supervision for all these new areas that are opening up, supervision and promotion of the lay training program, and proper liaison between the Mission and the churches.

The Fowler family was located in Sincelejo, the geographic center of the area where the LAM worked. Ernie traveled out in all directions for Bible conferences, lay-training institutes, and general counseling in the churches. Often his work became that

of "trouble shooter" as he was called upon to mediate or give advice in internal problems in the churches.

One of the great needs of the Colombian churches was a strong home life as the foundation for a vigorous church life. Frequently, families were divided in their beliefs. Fathers failed to take the leadership as head of the home; children became wayward; family altar was often unknown. Ernie made this a major emphasis of his ministry.

Often on his trips Ernie took along a "Timothy" whom he could teach by way of example. He singled out several of the promising young pastors and made them his objects of prayer and training.

Then an event took place which shook Ernie to the roots. During 1961 tensions had been building up between pastors and lay workers. We were on furlough at the end of the year, but Ernie felt strongly that I should be present for the annual convention of the Association of Evangelical Churches of the Caribbean in January, 1962.

Interrupting our furlough, I arrived in Colombia during the convention. Immediately, the president of the Association took me aside to ask if I would preside at a meeting of workers for thrashing out misunderstandings and patching up differences.

Since I had arrived fresh from a six-month absence, I felt unprepared for such an encounter. I tried to persuade him not to hold the meeting until it had been planned adequately. He would not be dissuaded, so it was called for that afternoon with the president presiding.

At 1:00 P.M. all the workers gathered under a large tree on the grounds of the Caribbean Bible Center. The president explained the purpose of the meeting. He was obviously not clear on it himself, although he rightly felt that some problems needed to be dealt with.

One after another of the national pastors rose to air old grievances against each other. It was appalling to hear detailed ac-

counts of offenses that occurred twenty years earlier. Names, dates, places, and even hours of the day were evoked in the complaints.

Foreign missionaries are often guilty of causing tensions and misunderstandings with the nationals. On this particular occasion, however, we were not involved. But Ernie, because of his close involvement in the church work, was soon dragged into the arguments. Each side wanted his support. When he refused to give it, after recognizing that many of the petty matters being aired were wrong from both sides, he was caught in a cross-fire. Before we knew what was happening, he became the object of their attacks.

So tense had feelings become that when Ernie could not recall a particular incident, one pastor called him a liar to his face. This was a staggering blow. Although it was said in the heat of argument, it was repeated later that day and supported by several others present. That evening I asked two of the accusers, "Do you believe that Ernie deliberately lied to you?" Without hesitation they both answered, "Yes." Painfully, not one national worker came to Ernie's defense, although many said subsequently that they had not agreed with the accusation.

Another factor intensified the bitterness of this experience for Ernie. When he was accused of being a liar, he momentarily lost control of his temper. In a sudden outburst he jumped up, spun on his accuser, and exploded, "All right! *Call* me a liar if you like!"

Before his conversion Ernie's temper was notorious. Afterward it was still a problem, which he fought constantly, although he seemed to be gaining victory over it. It had been years since his temper had gotten out of control in public. In a matter of seconds he realized what had happened and restrained himself, but for him the damage was done. The agony of soul that followed was deep.

Three and a half years later while on furlough Eve Fowler

wrote to me: "Don't forget to pray. I've never seen Ernest so thin and preoccupied as he now is and has been. I think he broods some even yet over what he calls his 'demise' of over three years ago."

Ernie was at the point where he was ready to say, "What's the use?" After nearly thirty years of service for his brethren, this was the result. He said to me at that time: "If they won't accept my integrity, how can I minister to them? If they don't believe my word, what sort of communication can I have? And without communication, what can I do for them? And besides, I lost my temper. How can I ever regain the lost ground?"

The temptation to give up was strong but the gifts and calling of God were without repentance. The man who had climbed out of elevator shafts before was ready to try again. The struggle in his own heart was intense, but his confidence in the will of God kept him going.

Ernie, however, now withdrew considerably in his relations with the national church. His attitude was: "If they don't want me, I won't force myself on them. But I know God wants me in Colombia, so here I remain until He leads me elsewhere." Even with that unshakable faith, he had serious questions about his future usefulness.

About that time it was becoming evident that the headquarters of the Latin America Mission in Cartagena were understaffed. My work in general administration took me out of Colombia on frequent trips, leaving field administration with Ernie as Deputy Field Director. Sincelejo was a poor location for him under such circumstances. The main offices were in Cartagena which was four hours away by bus. There were occasions when decisions had to be made or critical situations faced with no administrator present.

In September, 1962, we asked the Fowlers to move back to Cartagena. In spite of Ernie's aversion to administrative work, he once again accepted the task. For the next two years Ernie's

presence in Cartagena was a great help to me. He relieved me of many administrative details and was always available for counsel. Until then I had often wished for someone with whom I could discuss certain matters. Eve took over the Mission hospitality, serving with distinction in entertaining guests who were passing through.

Then another event happened which again affected Ernie's work. Manuel Baena, our Mission maintenance man, and his wife, Alba, resigned their relationship with the LAM to move to Barranquilla. Manuel had been a faithful and reliable worker —a rare thing among maintenance men in this part of Colombia. Residents of Cartagena know the headaches of finding a plumber or carpenter or mechanic who can be trusted. Manuel was one of these rare men.

When he left, Ernie was given the supervision of maintenance of all Mission property. He was not to do the work himself, but to see that it was done. Having grown up on a ranch, Ernie was handy with tools, and his years in Colombia had taught him the difficulty of finding trustworthy workers. Therefore, when faucets leaked, or a stove broke down, or plumbing overflowed, the person involved would call Ernie to send a man to fix it. A half hour later Ernie himself would arrive with his tool chest. Rolling up his sleeves, he would plunge into the job. He found it more satisfactory to do the job himself and see that it was done right, than to go through the frustrations of unreliable work. Again and again the protest would be raised, "But, Ernie, I didn't mean for *you* to do the job! Goodness knows, you have more important things to do!"

And Ernie, his face wrinkling up in a grin, would say, "Oh, forget it! We'll have this done in no time, and I'd rather be sure it's done right anyway."

Whether the work meant late hours, long trips, or menial tasks, he was "faithful in that which is least."

When in 1964 we celebrated his thirtieth anniversary in Co-

lombia, Ernie received many letters and telegrams from colleagues. Jacob Stam, president of the LAM Board of Trustees, spoke for the Mission family when he cabled:

On behalf trustees and personally please convey Ernest Fowler our love esteem admiration congratulations completion thirty years service Colombia. Few demonstrate more completely humility love of Christ in sacrificial service for others. I voice feelings of all in expressing appreciation for the past and need of him and best wishes for future. II Cor. 9:8.

Through the years since 1952 the pull to Indian work had always been strong in Ernie. Now that the country had become pacified once more, with the government controlling the violence in the hinterlands, and with Ernie's duties considerably altered, that pull became stronger.

I noticed that he would talk nostalgically and more frequently about his desire to return for one more attempt to reach the Yukpa Indians for Christ. He never complained about his present work and was always ready to stay wherever the Mission wanted him, but as he grew older the time for doing pioneer work became shorter.

In 1964 the Mission decided that Ernie had been "fixing faucets" (as we jokingly called his present work) long enough. We owed it to him and to the Lord to release him to return to the Indians. He received this news with deep satisfaction and began immediately to prepare for it.

The fifteen years since he left Indian territory and the twelve years since he arrived with the LAM in Cartagena may have appeared barren. He had moved "downward" from Field Director to church coordinator to maintenance man (we might almost call it janitor!). Yet in God's sight he had moved upward in service to others.

In 1966 Mary Anne Klein, LAM Candidate Secretary, wrote to me after I had reported on a trip with Ernie into the Indian territory where he was renewing his labors:

Just finished reading your fascinating report of your trip into the Yukpa (Motilon) Indians with Ernie. . . . Simply had to write you a note to tell you . . . how much I enjoyed the picture you gave of Ernie in his element. I somehow wish we could convey—especially to younger missionaries who get so easily frustrated when they are hindered (temporarily, perhaps) from doing what they feel basically called to do—Ernie's spirit through the years and the fact that the Lord kept not only his vision alive, but his very evident abilities.

Chapter 5

“Faithful unto Death”

As early as 1953 Ernie Fowler had written:

. . . should we begin thinking about emphasizing the responsibility of the Colombian Church to put these tribes on their missionary groups, and start praying the Lord of the harvest to raise up and send forth laborers of the young men of our congregations, planning to train them in the techniques and the understanding and the painfully accumulated knowledge . . . gleaned over the years?

It is true that we have always shrunk back from the tremendous problems involved in Colombians, Latins, ever being used to reach the Indian population. There has built such a pressure of mutual animosity and mutual misunderstanding between them and these tribes, so that as long as foreigners were available we preferred not to ever try, but in this present extremity, perhaps it is time to exercise faith and initiative and get under way.

With a renewed vision the Fowler family returned from furlough in September, 1965, settling in Cartagena. Ernie and Eve had a premonition that he would never see the United States

again once he returned to Colombia for this term of service. So strong was this feeling that they even shared it with their children. Ernie plunged into translation and literacy work and the training of Colombians. He began regular trips in two directions: to the south to cooperate with independent missionary, Gordon Horton, among the Eperá (Chocó) tribe of the upper Sinú River, and to the north to join Alick Clark and Carl Lehmann in Eroca, where he and Eve had lived in the late 1940's among the Yukpas.

Ernie, like an old soldier returning to the battlefield, was returning to the struggle of three decades to evangelize the Indians. He knew it would not be easy and fully expected to face opposition. In conversation with me, referring back to the defeats in Eroca of years before, including Harvey Hammond's death, he mused, "And who knows how many more lives will have to be laid down in those mountains before we can penetrate this territory of the Enemy?"

In January, 1966, I joined Ernie on a trip to Eroca in the Sierra de Perija. There I enjoyed a five-day visit in the home of Carl and Joan Lehmann. It was a ten-hour climb on foot, crossing rushing rivers, climbing razorback ridges, with heavy packs on our backs. As we came over the last ridge to descend into Eroca Canyon, darkness had already set in, and we could see the flicker of the fires and lamps in the Indian huts scattered up the mountainside. Suddenly Ernie let out a shout in the Yukpa language.

"What did you say?" I inquired.

"I've told them that I have come back."

As his echo died away a shout came back from across the canyon. A few moments later another call echoed from farther up the mountain, followed by another and another.

"There goes the mountain telegraph," Ernie laughed.

The "telegraph" did its work of informing the Indians up the mountains that their old friend, Ernesto, was back. Shortly after

dawn the next morning the Indians began to converge from every quarter, some arriving from as far away as an hour's walk. They had all received the message and were anxious to greet their friend. The grunts and loud bursts of delighted conversation made it very evident to me that Ernie enjoyed an unusual rapport with these people.

As on previous occasions when I had traveled with him to jungle Indians, I noticed how Ernie seemed to "blossom" forth as a new man when he got out among primitive people. I commented later to Eve that the farther Ernie got from civilization, the more he came into his element. After more than thirty years of frustrations and setbacks in his efforts to evangelize the Indians, one might have hoped that Ernie, now entering the waning years of a pioneer ministry, would see his lifelong efforts succeed. Such was not to be the case. Whether in Eroca with the Yukpas or on the Sinú River with the Eperás, history repeated itself. In May, 1966, after a particularly difficult trip with Gordon Horton on the Sinú River, when opposition came from every quarter, he wrote the following report:

I suppose everyone's natural tendency is to hold back information on the work or field in which he is involved until he can truthfully come up with a report of action and results that make encouraging reading. But perhaps, after all, this procedure is not really fair. Maybe anyone honestly interested has a right to share in the frustrations, perplexities and reverses we habitually leave as unwritten parentheses in "running accounts." So it is with a sort of dutiful reluctance I am writing this report on these last few days here on the scene.

Since Gordon Horton and his family (independent Plymouth Brethren missionaries) came to Tierra Alta we have shared a common triple goal:

1. Evangelization of the Eperá tribe of these headwaters.

2. Their earliest possible literacy, and
3. Their earliest possible provision with the indispensable instrument for their spiritual growth—the Word of God in their own language.

In spite of recurrent sickness and other barriers, Gordon has pressed forward here toward these goals. We have helped as we could and made these goals the constant burden of our prayers.

Last November when I was here, Gordon's first primers and books had begun to circulate along the upper reaches of the Sinú, Esmeralda, Verde, Caimán, Manso and San Jorge rivers. Here in Tierra Alta interested Indians from these headwaters were soon learning to read these simple primers, first aid instructions and Bible stories and taking them back to their homes. The understanding and cooperation they found here brought warmth and various degrees of spiritual response in some. However, [Yarrí,] the successor to the old chief on the Esmeralda, had, up to that time, been rather cool. In fact, at the insistence of the local priest he had tossed in the river what literature he had in his home.

However, while I was here there came a change. As we passed [old chief] Manuelito's place on the Esmeralda, Gordon made a routine courtesy stop there, planning to continue on to other more hospitable homes for the night. To our surprise, on that occasion, our reception was more friendly, and [he] eventually insisted we should not only sleep and eat at his place during our stay in Esmeralda, but also invited us to come back in the month of May to teach both adults and children to read.

We scrupulously kept the month of May clear of other engagements, but before April was out, circumstances beyond our control set in motion several currents of events which almost entirely disrupted our plans and affected greatly our program for the month.

The morning of the 30th of April Gordon met my flight in Montería airport and we came on up the Sinú in his outboard to Tierra Alta. Monday we were ready for the trip. A generous supply of Eperá primers, notebooks, pencils and practice sheets were on hand to be packed in a big U.S. surplus cartridge case. With this sealed and painted bright orange, it could be recovered if the boat should capsize in up-river rapids.

Monday afternoon the chief himself and one of his men floated into port on a raft loaded with wood and fruit from his place to be sold here in town. We waited till he had finished his trading. Wednesday we were again ready to start.

By the time we were loaded it developed that the Indians had too much cargo for the aluminum boat, so we had to transfer the load and the outboard motor to an appropriate sized dugout canoe! We were finally under way, but not before an incident occurred which presaged one more chain of events to interrupt our projected program. One of Horton's two young dogs followed us to the port, got into a scuffle with another dog and subsequently disappeared.

Though the water was high, the first part of our trip was uneventful. Before long, however, quantities of trash and sticks began to appear on the river, then bigger stuff, and finally big uprooted trees and driftwood of every size so filled the river it was no longer safe to try to thread our way up through it. We tied up for the night at the ranch of one of Gordon's friends. By morning the river was clear and we were able to reach Manuelito's place in Esmeralda.

Here, too, we found something wrong. Manuelito's enthusiasm for the campaign seemed to have cooled. He was in an argumentative frame of mind. The young men felt we should teach them Spanish, he said. As for him, he would be too busy to spend any time with us on it . . . all this when he had invited us and had insisted we should teach both adults and

children, beginning in his own household! We noticed cases of rum and beer off to one side in his house. Perhaps he had gotten himself involved in something which made our presence suddenly inconvenient.

Gordon and an Indian companion went back down to Tierra Alta to receive the guest who would be arriving. Andrés [the Colombian believer who came along to help] and I stayed on to do what we could in preparation for the campaign. Saturday we visited Manuelito's brother, Santander, who we knew to be one of the major sources of criticism, and others of the region. Sunday quite a few Indians gathered, and in the evening Manuelito's hut was crowded. The few believers sang a number of Eperá hymns and choruses. I was really impressed with the earnest witness and consistent Christian conduct of Andrés. Though he couldn't speak any Eperá, his conduct made an impression on everyone, and his witness was clear to all who could understand Spanish.

Monday morning when we were to start teaching, Manuelito went off early to his field, and no one turned up from any of the other houses. We went ahead with the children and young people of his household, ending up that morning with some eight pupils. Most of them did pretty well learning the first simple lessons. In the afternoon other young people came in and joined the informal classes.

Monday afternoon Gordon returned in his aluminum boat with news of further complications.

It developed that his lost pup had been bitten some days before by a dog that now turned out to have rabies. The dog's owner had killed the pup and thrown him in the river, so there was no way to find out whether or not he had had rabies. Since several of the Horton household had been "mouthing" by him, there was no alternative but to begin anti-rabies injections on all of them. Gordon had to wire the American Embassy to get the serum, so would have to return

down-river to begin the injections as soon as they came.

We were disappointed to lose his help again, especially since he is the only one who has any facility in the language, but we were willing to carry on.

However, we still were not through with the chain of disagreeable surprises. It became evident that Manuelito was getting restless about our using his house any longer for the classes. We read the symptoms, although he had said nothing, and so we prepared to change our headquarters casually and tactfully to the house of Susa who, with his wife, is a believer. We had some classes there with his boys and real cooperation from him. He had been one of the first to learn to read himself.

In the afternoon an Indian arrived up-river with word for Gordon that the anti-rabies serum had arrived, and word for Manuelito from the Bishop in Montería that he would be up to visit the Esmeralda groups that week end!

Gordon went and frankly discussed the matter with Manuelito. Did he want us to go? No, he didn't want to run anyone off. What would be best as far as he was concerned? No answer. Would the Bishop stop in if we stayed? No, if he saw our boat tied up there he would go on up-river and skip that place. Would that be bad for Manuelito's household? Well, the Bishop would be angry with him. Would that be bad? Well, he didn't want anyone to feel they could not stop in at his place. All right then, we would leave—go back down-river and come again later. The old chief was clearly relieved at this solution to his dilemma. So ended our first school experiment!

However, both Santander and Manuelito, in an impulsive show of confidence, sent down with us their favorite sons, Quimi and Orlando. They loaded the boat pretty heavily with avocados and fruit to sell in the market . . . too much, really. We were too low and sluggish in the rapids and so hit a hidden rock a sharp blow that was to turn up further

trouble for us, getting a good soaking as we plowed into the high waves below the rapids.

We took the boys' trip out as from the Lord and set to work with them, spending as much time on their primers each day as their concentration span would take. The boys are both pretty sharp and came along well.

We saw the Bishop's party come back into port on their return from up-river. They had not been able to reach Esmeralda for rough water, and had lost some of their equipment in the river. Word came down from one town where they visited that the Bishop had publicly impugned the faith and morals of the Evangelicals, warning his people not to offer them hospitality, not even so much as a glass of water!

After the Bishop got back, we could have returned to Esmeralda to continue classes in Susa's house, but by this time Gordon's anti-rabies shots were causing some drastic lymphatic reactions. Since we could not go up on the date planned, he sent the two Indian boys up with a responsible canoe man who was taking a load of freight up the river. The boys had shown openness and response to the gospel as well as in their classes, and we pray they may turn out to be "ambassadors" to their fathers' households.

Finally, Gordon's lymphatic reaction became so serious that he went to Montería, combining a visit to the doctor and a visit to the authorities to pick up the family's identification papers which were being processed. The doctor ordered penicillin for the secondary infection resulting from the serum, and absolute rest till the shots were finished. When he went for their identification papers in the morning, the government official told him to come back at 2 P.M. At that hour he returned to the office and all the necessary components were on hand and the papers ready for the official's signature, when in walked a messenger with a telegram from the Capital. The official turned to Gordon with a wry smile when he had read it. "I'm sorry, I can't sign your

papers. I have just been relieved of my position by superiors in Bogotá. You will have to come back to get these papers when my successor takes office."

Gordon managed one good day of rest as per doctor's orders, but the next day was up and out "just to give the outboard a routine checkover" to make sure it would be ready for the pending return up-river.

His checkover first revealed a defective pump and a screw which had vibrated loose from the motor. In getting at the latter he discovered another development in the mechanism which at best would have inevitably left us stranded up-river, and which might have gotten us into serious trouble in some stretch of rough water or rapids. The "routine checkover" turned into an all-day repair job which took physical toll, vindicating the doctor's warnings and instructions.

We dropped all further plans for any immediate return up-river, and went back to the work of filing and analysis, interrupted by occasional but very welcome visits from some of the Indians in the region south of us.

All this endless chain of interruptions, inconveniences and difficulties must read like the plot of some tragic comedy! Can you imagine what it is like to be in it—to see the opportunity to reach this tribe and the urgency of their spiritual need, and to find yourself blocked at every turn? We realize we are participants in an age-old pitched battle between two tremendous forces. We know why there is such resistance to the penetration of the gospel and the growing knowledge of the Son of God as Lord and Saviour among this tribe. We do not know what it is going to cost us, our families and any others related to this program, but we do know WHO in this battle is the strongest.

Within less than three months Ernie was to become the next victim of the battle. On Wednesday, August 3, Ernie's ministry was ended abruptly.

Was Ernie Fowler, after thirty-two years of hardships, a failure? No church exists among the Yukpa Indians; no Scriptures are in their hands; few Indians, if any, know how to read even if they did have the Scriptures; perhaps a handful at best have shown some comprehension of the truths of the gospel. Or is it not "required in a steward that a man be found faithful" rather than fruitful? Therein lay the secret of Ernie Fowler's life.

The Colombian press carried the story of his death for several days in a row. They gave great credit to this man who had invested his life on behalf of Colombia's Indians.

Carl Lehmann, whom Ernie had replaced in Eroca while he got some vacation, said: "In a very real sense Ernie died for me. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

Then Carl wrote me:

Dave, whatever tribute is written up to the life and testimony of beloved Ernie, we would add our testimony to his presence and labor with us, that we have never had anyone in our home whose very presence was oil to the machinery and whose total deportment was as refreshing as snow-air. . . . We know that Ernie's place will not be filled. When the Lord made him he threw away the mold. Indeed his life and character were molded through the things he suffered. Northern Colombia will long lament his homegoing. Your mission will long appreciate the ministry he filled. We, too, know that we have lost an irreplaceable friend and fellow soldier unto the Kingdom of God.

Among the flood of tributes that poured in during the following days, a letter from a Roman Catholic priest in Sincelejo spoke more eloquently than most.

Brothers in Christ Jesus,

I send you my deepest sympathy for the death of Dr. Ernest Fowler, innocent victim of a criminal act.

But we do not look on his death as a bereavement but rather as a departure to the Lord. He gave his life in the service of the Word and the People of God. He lived vigilant and with his lamp burning.

May his memory serve as an example for all of us who have the same faith in the Saviour.

Receive my brotherly greetings.

As I read that, my mind went back to a scene in Magangué, Colombia, in January, 1958. I saw Ernie standing up in righteous indignation against the local priest who had violated the civil and religious rights of a believer. I wondered if God might allow Ernie to know how another priest in Sincelejo was now recognizing him as a faithful man of God.

Speaking for the Latin America Mission, Associate General Director W. Dayton Roberts wrote to Eve:

The Lord must love you deeply, Eve, to entrust to your stewardship such a jarring and grievous experience. In what fuller measure could He call upon you to share in the fellowship of His own sufferings? Our only consolation—and yours—is the realization that somehow this bitterness is for His glory, and that the valley of the shadow of death leads to the table of His triumph, spread in the presence of the enemy, where our cup indeed runneth over.

Even for me the loss of Ernie's companionship is hard to take. More than we had realized, we have taken for granted his careful judgment, his sensitivity to the feelings and reactions of others, his skills in communication, his unfailing sense of humor, his loyalty, dedication and zeal for Jesus Christ. In his person, his vocation and his attitudes, Ernie

typified and symbolized the best of contemporary missions. In a very real sense he was "Mr. Missionary"

On the day that Ernie died, the evening reading in the *Daily Light* included the following verses:

He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. . . . Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

Part 2



Chapter 6

"We Don't Want Protestants"

Shortly after the death of Ernie Fowler, Dr. José Fajardo, president of the Evangelical Confederation of Colombia, referred to him as the first missionary martyr in Colombia. In so doing he was linking Ernie with a long line of Colombian Protestants who in recent years had "fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas," ultimately giving their lives rather than denying their faith. While the circumstances surrounding Ernie's death were distinct from those of other believers, and while the reasons for the attack were not entirely clear, nonetheless the violent nature of his death as he carried out the Great Commission linked him to the martyrs of the previous decade. There was some evidence that the terrorists who killed him were communists who wished to eliminate him from the area so that they would have a freer hand for their activities.

In the ecumenical spirit of the present day it may be hard to remember that a few short years ago relations between Roman Catholics and Protestants were anything but cordial. In Colombia the words "separated brethren," much less "Christian brethren," were never heard. Protestants were known rather as "heretics." Today, however, a new atmosphere envelops the country. Priests and others who at their best would have avoided

Protestants and at their worst would have attacked them, now welcome them as brothers in Christ. Whereas Pope Pius XII could refer to Protestants as "wily enemies" and speak of the need for "energetic vigilance . . . to repel them," and could list Protestantism as one of the "four mortal dangers which threaten the Church," Pope Paul VI in August, 1968, openly invited them to participate in the thirty-ninth International Eucharistic Congress in Bogotá. On the basis of doctrinal convictions most Protestants declined the invitation, but it is significant that such an invitation should come.

This new spirit is welcomed by Roman Catholics and Protestants alike. It is hoped that never again will the tensions and bitterness of a former era be found in Colombia. But the fact that the spirit has changed does not alter the historical facts of what took place previously.

Since 1948 some 120 evangelical Christians in Colombia were martyred because of their faith and witness. They died by shootings, by machetes, by beatings, and in other ways. In order to understand the church of Christ in Colombia today, it is necessary to understand something of these men whose blood has become the seed of a thriving church. Who were they? How did they live? How and why did they die?

The night was calm as Señor Pérez, his wife, and seven children retired as usual in their rustic home in the village of San Antonio de Fortalecillas, in the state of Huila, Colombia. It was May, 1954. Colombia was in the worst period of violence in her turbulent history.

Eleven days earlier Pérez and his twelve-year-old son, Bernardo, had been arrested. For several hours they were tortured in the local police station to get them to renounce their Protestant faith. They were hung up by the thumbs for a long period. Then they were released with the threat that unless they complied, their entire family would be killed "so no seed of this wickedness

will remain." In the firmness of their faith in Jesus Christ, the Pérez family refused to deny their Lord.

The days passed uneventfully until the night of May 19.

Shortly after midnight a mob armed with machetes and rifles burst into the home where the Pérez family slept peacefully. Immediately, both parents were shot. Machetes flashed as the frightened children tried to escape. More shots rang out, mingled with the screams of those being attacked and the bloodthirsty cries of "Down with the Protestants!" and "Long Live the Virgin!"

In a matter of moments it was all over. The bodies of two parents and six of their seven children lay massacred.

One Pérez boy, David, although badly slashed by a machete, miraculously escaped the carnage of that night. He found his way over the mountains to the home of an uncle who got him into a hospital. For the next year and a half David was like a person wandering in a dream. Although recuperating well from his physical wounds, he needed time to recover from the emotional shock which had scarred his life. He was taken into the home of Christian and Missionary Alliance missionaries Lee and Ruth Tennies, who nursed him back to physical and emotional health and became his "second parents."

David's gaze was steady, his voice firm, his whole frame composed as he related to me the story of that sordid night.

Five years later he was graduated from the Christian and Missionary Alliance Bible Institute in Armenia, Colombia, and I met him as he was about to enter the pastorate. After listening to that experience, I asked, "David, how do you feel about those who murdered your family? Do you have any desire to seek revenge upon them?"

His answer was quick and unequivocal. "Quite the contrary. Strange as it may seem, I find only love in my heart for them. They did that because they didn't know Christ. Had they known Him, they never would have done it. I would like to return and

give them the gospel. That is why I have been in the Bible Institute for the past three years."

In 1949 Roberto Cardona and his brother Benjamín were both shot at their home in Betania, in the state of Valle. Roberto died instantly, and Benjamín was finished off with a machete. Germancito Cardona, three-year-old son of Roberto, witnessed the murder of his father and suffered a nervous affliction from which he never recovered. Two months later he died calling incessantly for his father.

For years the Roman Catholic Church in other countries consistently believed that the persecution in Colombia was only a by-product of political violence. On the contrary, it was, in many cases, planned and instigated by civil and ecclesiastical authorities.

In July, 1951, a priest in Meta gave orders for all the Protestants of a certain town to be exterminated. A few days later four civilians and ten policemen armed with rifles and sub-machine guns rushed into the home of Carlos Arturo Gahona, an evangelical believer of the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade. To shouts of "Down with the Protestants!" and "Long Live the Catholic Church!" they murdered his three sons, a daughter-in-law, and three grandchildren. One of the grandchildren, four-month-old Carlos Arturo, was thrown across the patio onto a pile of broken bottles and died vomiting blood.

Not all the persecution took such violent forms, but all of it was directed toward the elimination or severe restriction of the evangelical faith.

One day I sat on the grounds of the Caribbean Bible Center in Sincelejo talking with some believers at the annual church conference. A middle-aged woman came up and presented me with a letter on which she wanted some advice. It was from the parish priest of Toluviejo, who was also the priest for Macaján, where

she lived. Since there was no evangelical chapel in that town, she held services in her home. The letter read as follows:

Toluviejo—January 21, 1960

I wish to say to you that out of love I am warning you not to open your home again for Protestant services; because I have received some complaints about your meetings and they assured me that they will not be responsible for what might happen, and that they only hoped that I would advise you, so that they can proceed with the purpose which they have against the preachers of Macaján, be it you or men from Sincelejo; and the most beautiful part is that if anything happens to your lives, I will not permit the law to punish anyone; first they would have to punish me and those interested will continue fighting; therefore the most prudent course would be to stop [these services] for the safety of your lives, since the life of man is such a precious gift from God. I did not discover this plot, but according to what they have given me to understand it includes death and burning of the house where services are held; thus it is better to prevent than to cure, and it is my duty to warn you; I am keeping a copy of this for what may transpire in defense of those involved.

{signed} Father Luis Jaramillo

Upon finishing the letter I asked what she planned to do about it. With a quick smile she said, "I plan to go right ahead and hold the services as much as I want in my home." The threat of the priest was never carried out in this case, but the fact that he made it was significant. Scores of similar threats were carried out elsewhere during the years of persecution.

Sometimes, when it was not possible to stifle the faith of an evangelical, other methods were employed. One sultry afternoon in January, 1958, in the Magdalena River port of Mangangué,

we were gathered for a church convention. Suddenly, a girl rushed in from the street and spoke urgently to Ernie Fowler, who at that time was Field Director of the Latin America Mission in Colombia. Ernie bolted out the door, and I decided to follow, sensing that some trouble was brewing.

The mother of one of the pastors was on her deathbed in her home in Magangué. A local priest had gone to the home with two policemen for protection. He had forcibly pronounced last rites over her while she was unconscious, even though she was a professing evangelical. His purpose was obvious: he could later claim that she had received extreme unction on her deathbed, renounced her Protestant "heresy," and returned to the fold of the Roman Catholic Church.

With these facts, Ernie and I headed straight for the mayor's office to file a complaint against the priest for invasion of private property and of personal rights. The mayor kept us waiting in the outer office for an hour. Meanwhile, the priest also arrived, and we engaged in some rather heated discussion, which drew a large crowd. He declared publicly that as a representative of God on earth he would carry out his duties even if it had to be at gunpoint!

Presently, the mayor received the priest (although we had been waiting considerably longer than he) and listened privately to his version. Then, upon emerging from his office, the mayor informed us that it was now 6:00 P.M. and too late to do further business. He would wait on us the following day. When we asked him why he had received the priest instead of us, he bristled and retorted that that was his business.

The following day we returned with a delegation of local evangelicals. One of them tried to show the mayor a copy of the section on religious liberty from the national constitution. He turned his back and snapped, "Don't show me that stuff!" and refused to discuss it. The matter ended there.

Destruction of property became an integral part of the attempts to hinder Protestant work. In a ten-year period, sixty churches were totally destroyed by dynamite or fire, while eighty-nine others were partially destroyed.

Notable among these was the chapel of the Inter-American Mission in Colorado in the state of Bolívar. Efforts to construct the chapel resulted in its being destroyed on several occasions. Repeatedly, that group secured official papers from the government offices in Cartagena, the state capital of Bolívar, granting permission to build and guaranteeing the right of the Protestants to worship there. And repeatedly, orders were defied by local leaders in Colorado.

On one occasion, after initial efforts to build had been stopped by a violent mob and the pastor threatened with his life, the pastor came to me in Cartagena for aid in seeking government support. We went to some of the highest officials in the state government. He reported that the leader of the mob in Colorado had declared that the government could write out all the orders they wanted in Cartagena, but in Colorado they took orders from no one but the priest. When this was stated to the Under-Secretary of Government, he shrugged his shoulders and said, "What can a fellow do?"

Three years later efforts were renewed to build the chapel. Again official papers were secured. The walls were partially up and materials on hand to complete the construction when the priest from a nearby town visited Colorado. The next day the mob attacked again. They tore down the walls, destroyed the materials, attacked the pastoral house, and forced the pastor to flee to the woods for his life. He narrowly escaped down the river in a canoe. He came to me in Cartagena two days later, visibly shaken.

For the next few weeks some men of that village watched the river approaches, awaiting his return and vowing to kill him on sight. He was never able to return. Friends had to smuggle out

his family and goods. Ernie Fowler went personally to Colorado to investigate the situation and was told in no uncertain terms by some of the village folk that he would see his own burial before he left. He had several harrowing experiences during the two days he was there, including having a machete swung at him, but returned unharmed with the three companions who had accompanied him.

The violence was directed more against Colombian evangelicals than against foreign missionaries, although the latter had their share of suffering in some areas. Several missionaries were arrested and jailed, others were stoned and threatened, some were fired at, but none was killed during the years of the violence.

The outstanding case of a missionary (or anyone else for that matter) being persecuted was that of the Rev. William C. Easton of the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade in Mariquita, Tolima. Dr. James Goff refers to this as "the classic example of torture in which all forms seemed to converge." Easton has told his story in full elsewhere,* but it can be summarized as follows:

On Friday night, June 15, 1951, Easton was conducting a young people's service in the chapel. The police interrupted the service, beating him and three young men with rifle butts and the broadside of a sword. Taking them outside, the police knocked them to the ground, beating and kicking them. Then they were marched through the streets to the police barracks where they were booked as communists.

The next few hours in the barracks were a nightmare. They were forced to trot around the courtyard while being kicked, clubbed, and whipped, with periodic dunkings in a tank of cold water. They were forced to drag themselves around on their stomachs while being beaten. Then they were obliged to sing hymns, preach a sermon (for which they were beaten), and burn

* *Colombian Conflict* (London: Christian Literature Crusade, 1954).

their Bible and hymnbooks.

Stripped naked, they were dragged around further and forced to roll in hot ashes of rice chaff. They were ordered to fight each other while the police continued to beat them with clubs and whips. Some of the other torture that was meted out cannot be described here because of its obscene and degraded nature.

One of the amazing aspects of this case, as in most of the thousands of cases of persecution during a ten-year span, was the reaction of Easton to his treatment. When he was asked by the police if he were not the Devil himself, he replied, "I am only a humble servant of Jesus Christ." The following morning, upon being released, Easton offered his hand in forgiveness to the police sergeant who had directed the torture, but the sergeant turned away. Easton's body still bears the scars of suffering.

The abduction of children was another form of persecution. There are three such cases on record.

The first took place in Manizales, Caldas. Abraham and Obdulio Morales, twelve and eleven years old, were sons of a member of the Christian and Missionary Alliance who had been murdered as a Protestant martyr in 1950. On July 7, 1953, they were abducted from school and turned over to a Jesuit priest, who placed them in a Catholic orphanage. Their distraught mother carried her pleas unsuccessfully through a local judge, the National Police, the Army, and the governor of Caldas. All disregarded Colombian law and human rights by declaring that since the abduction was ordered by a priest, they could not interfere. Since the widow was by their definition an apostate Catholic, the children, having been baptized in infancy as Catholics, must be brought up in the Catholic faith. Civil law declared itself powerless to intervene and even supported ecclesiastical action.

For three months every effort to recover the boys was frustrated. When the Evangelical Confederation of Colombia pub-

lized the case sufficiently, public pressure both in Colombia and abroad finally forced the authorities to return the boys to their mother.

The second case took place in Cali, Valle, on June 28, 1957. Mariana and Francia Rojas, ages twelve and ten, were enticed away from home by a friend who took them to a priest, Father Juan Bautista Ramírez. He placed them in a Catholic orphanage in Palmira, eighteen miles away. The girls' mother, who was eight months' pregnant at the time, suspected what had happened and went to Father Ramírez. They quarreled, and he slapped her three times. It took four days of negotiations with government and ecclesiastical officials and the help of various people before the Rojas girls were returned to their parents.

I recall vividly the case of Jorge, Absalom, and Miguel Osorio, ages twelve, eleven, and nine. On April 4, 1960, they were abducted from the Presbyterian Colegio Colón in Medellín by police and delivered to the care of their Roman Catholic uncle. For nine days our concern grew rapidly as the story was publicized in the press through the efforts of the Evangelical Confederation of Colombia. Civil authorities had published a decree legalizing the kidnaping. Public pressure finally forced them to countermand their own decree, and the children were returned to their parents.

In a statement to the Evangelical Confederation, Canon Francisco Duque Osorio, judge of the Archdiocesan Ecclesiastical Court, defended the abduction in an eight-point declaration. He said that the father, formerly a Roman Catholic, had "committed the crime of heresy by joining a Protestant sect" and consequently had forfeited his right to educate his children. Therefore, "the supernatural right which the Church has over its subjects (baptized persons) in order to preserve their true faith, to protect them from the danger of perversion, and to keep them from falling into false faith or heresy" took precedence over the natural right of parents to educate their children. The kidnaping was thus justified.

Referring to these three cases, Dr. Goff says, "In the files of the Evangelical Confederation of Colombia, covering thousands of cases of persecution, no more repulsive and heartless acts can be found than the abduction of the children of these three families."

Another area of persecution that deserves a separate study of its own is the field of education. Dr. Goff has classified the problem which Protestants faced as: Control of Education by the Roman Catholic Church; Discrimination against Protestant Children in Public Schools; Discrimination against Protestant Schools; and Discrimination against Protestant Teachers. There are hundreds of cases in these categories.

The control of the Roman Catholic Church over public education has had a sweeping influence. In a 1957 pastoral letter Monsignor Luis Concha stated, "The Church, a perfect society, instituted by Christ to lead men to their ultimate goal, has in education rights of a supernatural order." In a collective pastoral letter from bishops of Colombia in 1958 this position was reaffirmed, declaring the supreme rights of the Church in all fields of education, and criticizing the government for permitting non-Catholic schools to function.

The results of this teaching were seen clearly in a government *Curriculum Guide Book* for primary education. The first objective of the Colombian public school was stated as "to mold religious and moral habits which will form the child's character and make him a convinced and practicing Catholic." The State of Cundinamarca, where the capital of Bogotá is located, published a decree in 1957 establishing the following regulations for public schools: (1) Public schools must have a Roman Catholic atmosphere, including the display in all classrooms of Catholic religious images; (2) the local public school inspector in each place must be the parish priest, and he has to approve the list of teachers in all schools; (3) the president of every public school board of education must be the parish priest; (4) attendance at

the Mass and instruction in the Roman Catholic religion is compulsory for all public school children; (5) Catholic priests must give religious orientation to public school teachers; (6) Catholic prayers must be recited in public school classrooms.

Such a policy permeated all levels of education and resulted in widespread discrimination.

Gustavo Rodríguez attempted to enroll in the National Pedagogical University of Colombia in Tunja in 1955. A letter of refusal from the president of the University, Dr. Rafael Salamanca Aguilera, stated that his application "has been denied because this Institution is orientated by the philosophy of the Catholic Church, which is the Church of the Nation." Rodríguez later went to the United States, where he completed university and postgraduate studies. He is now executive secretary of the Bible Society of Colombia.

The harassment of Protestant children in public schools sometimes reached intolerable limits. Physical punishment, public humiliation, mockery, and expulsion were all used. When I first realized the type of teaching about Protestants that was given in public schools, it was not hard to understand how children would join teachers and priests in harassing the evangelicals. This can best be typified by a song taught extensively in public schools, containing some twenty verses, four of which say:

Protestant liars,
Your Church is not of Christ;
It is of Zwingli and Luther
And Calvin, another minister.

Hundreds of (Protestant) pastors
Are invading our country now;
They are devouring wolves
That come to us from abroad.

With a plate of food
You corrupt the hungry ones;
Just wait, in the life to come
You will pay with torment.

It is the faith of our fathers
Which they are going to take from us,
Let's stop being cowards
And begin to fight.

Chorus: We don't want Protestants,
Who come to Colombia to corrupt us;
We don't want Protestants,
Who stain our Fatherland and our Faith.

Protestant schools were closed by civil and ecclesiastical orders. My first introduction to the tactic of endless red tape to prevent the functioning of a school came in 1959. The new evangelical primary school in El Carmen, Bolívar, requested me to process their application for license with the Secretary of Education in the state capital of Cartagena. One of the regulations required the director of the school to have a certificate of good conduct from the parish priest. Being an evangelical prevented her from securing this. So I inquired of the Secretary of Education what he would accept in its place. He instructed me to secure a good conduct statement signed by three leading citizens of El Carmen. This was done immediately.

When I presented it to the Secretary his comment was, "I don't know these men. I've never heard of any of them; therefore I cannot accept this." When I reminded him that the statement had been secured at his recommendation, he flatly refused further discussion. So I inquired what else would be acceptable.

"A certificate of good conduct from the local school inspector."
"And who is the local school inspector?"

"The parish priest"!

I realized that we were caught in a vicious circle with no exit, which made it impossible to get the license.

During a ten-year period 270 schools were closed. In 1951 at the height of the violence the country was 42.5 per cent illiterate. In 1953 a study prepared by the National Director of Primary Education indicated that only 44 per cent of the children between the ages of seven and fourteen were enrolled in school. To understand the motivation behind such actions, it is necessary to understand the political and religious climate of that period.

Chapter 7

God and Caesar

“T

he persecution of Protestants in Colombia developed out of a Church-State relationship in which the purposes of the Roman Catholic Church and the policies of the Conservative party were closely identified," states Dr. James Goff. This relationship has its roots in the latter part of the nineteenth century and developed over subsequent years through a series of attitudes and actions.

In the traditional two-party system of Colombia the Conservative party has generally represented the interests of the clergy and thus the Roman Catholic Church. The Liberal party has espoused freedom in all of its dimensions, including freedom of worship, and particularly freedom from the involvement of the Roman Catholic Church in politics.

In the middle of the nineteenth century there was a ground-swell of anticlerical reaction throughout Latin America, including Colombia. The Society of Jesus (Jesuits) was banned from Colombia on three occasions: 1767, 1850, and 1861. Even the Archbishop of Bogotá was banished in 1851 for his opposition to the Liberals, who declared the State supreme over the Church. Again in 1861 the Archbishop was imprisoned for disobeying two laws in Church-State relationships with which he disagreed.

By the latter part of the century the Conservative reaction against the Liberals' stand on religious liberty (which had deprived the Roman Catholic Church of its privileged position) was growing stronger. The most significant development in Colombia's long history of Church-State relationships was the signing of a Concordat between the Vatican and the government of Colombia in 1887. The Conservatives had regained power through President Rafael Nuñez, a Liberal who turned Conservative.

Article 1 of the Concordat states: "The Roman Catholic Apostolic Religion is the religion of Colombia; the Public Powers recognize it as an essential element of the social order, and they are bound to protect and enforce respect for it and its ministers, leaving to it at the same time the full enjoyment of its rights and prerogatives."

The Concordat gives the Church extensive control over the educational system of the country and over burials and marriages. It makes the Church virtually independent of civil power with the right to "free exercise of its spiritual authority and ecclesiastical jurisdiction." It also gives the government the right to sign treaties on missions with the Holy See without submitting them to approval of Congress. The Treaty on Missions of 1953 was a direct result of this provision and was used as the basis for acute persecution of Protestants in Roman Catholic mission territories. The Concordat also requires the government of Colombia to support the Church with an annual stipend of 4.5 per cent interest in perpetuity on Church property confiscated by the government prior to 1886.

Under President Nuñez a new Constitution was drafted in 1886, which included Article 38, "The Apostolic Roman Catholic Religion is the religion of the Nation." This has often been interpreted by Catholic leaders to mean that to be a good Colombian one must be a Roman Catholic. Protestants were thus relegated to a position of second-class citizens who were considered a menace to the cultural heritage of the country.

In 1930, after more than forty years out of power, the Liberals

regained control of the government. In 1936 the Constitution was revised under the Liberal regime of President Alfonso López. Article 38 was struck out, and Article 53 guaranteeing freedom of religion to all citizens was inserted.

These actions evoked bitter opposition from the hierarchy. An open letter to Congress dated March 17, 1936, signed by fourteen bishops and four archbishops, including Monsignor Ismael Perdomo, Primate of the Colombian Church, threatened to lead the faithful into civil disobedience if this amendment was approved. Even the Vatican intervened in a formal protest from the Secretary of State, Eugenio Cardinal Pacelli, later crowned as Pope Pius XII. Congress disregarded the threats, and the new Constitution was ratified.

Nevertheless, subsequent Conservative governments in practice have applied the spirit of the Constitution of 1886 rather than the letter of the Constitution of 1936. I have often heard it stated that the Roman Catholic religion is the official religion of the State.

Between 1930 and 1946 the Liberals instituted many reforms affecting labor, social change, and religious liberty. Tensions grew between the two major parties, whose ideological differences were considerable. The Conservatives, fighting to maintain the status quo, opposed reforms which threatened the privileged status of the Roman Catholic Church and the landed oligarchy.

The opposition was led by Laureano Gómez, leader of the Conservative party, who espoused fascism by supporting Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco, and by opposing the Allied cause during World War II.

In spite of notable advances, the Liberal party fell into internal dispute. In 1946 two Liberal candidates ran for president as a result of the split within the party. This enabled Conservative Mariano Ospina Pérez, Laureano Gómez's hand-picked candidate, to be elected to the presidency with only 41 per cent of the popular vote.

The next two years witnessed a campaign, at first subtle but

soon open and violent, directed by Laureano Gómez and President Ospina Pérez, to eliminate the Liberal party as an effective force in politics. Police harassment, jail sentences, beatings, long confinements without trial, attacks on Liberal headquarters, heavy fines, all became common practices in the effort to intimidate and silence the Liberals.

Undeclared civil war broke out into the open on April 9, 1948. Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, the outstanding Liberal leader, who would probably have been their next presidential candidate, was assassinated on the streets of Bogotá. Pandora's box was opened wide. The capital was plunged into an orgy of rioting, bloodshed, looting, and burning which came to be known as the *bogotazo*. The violence spread quickly through the country and the next decade witnessed guerrilla warfare that, by the most conservative estimates, claimed the lives of over 200,000 citizens.

The Roman Catholic Church joined hands with the Conservative party in declarations of war against the Liberals for advocating freedom of education, religious liberty, civil marriage, and other similar causes. Bishop Miguel Angel Builes in a 1949 Lenten Pastoral Letter labeled the Liberals as "the enemy of Christ," "anti-Christian," and "communist." Monsignor Crisanto Luque, who was soon to become the Cardinal Archbishop of Bogotá, warned, "It is not licit for any Catholic to vote for the persons affiliated with present-day Liberalism."

In November, 1949, President Ospina Pérez dissolved Congress and declared the country under a state of siege. Since Liberals were stripped of all power and any control over voting procedures, they abstained from the presidential election of November 27, 1949. Laureano Gómez was elected, claiming nearly 100 per cent of the vote. Democracy was dead. The campaign to eliminate the Liberal party was intensified and the bloodshed of the next few years was incalculable.

By 1953 even the Army, which usually stayed out of politics but which had now been supporting the Conservative campaigns,

had taken enough of Gómez's unilateral methods. He was deposed on June 13, 1953, in a bloodless coup directed by General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla. The country breathed a sigh of relief, hoping that liberty and peace would once more reign. Their hopes were soon dashed. Rojas Pinilla, having himself formally declared president, proved to be as much a tyrant as Gómez.

Four years of Rojas Pinilla's administration were more than enough for the Colombians. On May 10, 1957, opposition forces toppled him from power, sending him into exile. Ironically, Laureano Gómez, in exile in Spain, was returned to the country as a national hero! (The irony has become even more compounded. While I was writing this book, I witnessed in Bogotá a huge demonstration with Rojas Pinilla, who had been restored to his full rights as a citizen. A howling, flag-waving, horn-tooting crowd plugged traffic for blocks in the center of the city as they shouted the praises of their hero.)

The intertwining Church-State relationship between the Conservatives and the Roman Catholic hierarchy laid an ideal foundation for the suppression of Protestants. The Conservative press carried on a systematic campaign to link Protestants with the violence by stating repeatedly that they were attacking the government, the Church, the public culture, and morality. Articles identifying Protestantism with communism appeared repeatedly in the secular and religious press.

This type of approach was not indigenous to Colombia. Unfortunately, it came from the top down.

At the close of the Catholic Congress of Christ the King held in Bogotá in September, 1945, Pope Pius XII addressed the Colombian nation by radio from the Vatican, saying:

We beseech you to preserve complete and unchanged the sacred deposit of your faith, not permitting it to be contaminated by that propaganda, as audacious as it is cunning, which wishes to convert into a mission land a people who

count in their glorious history four centuries of irreproachable Christianity.

Lest there be any doubt as to the Pope's references, the Jesuits promptly issued a commentary on the speech, making it clear that he was referring to the Protestants.

In his 1955 letter *Ad Ecclesias Cristi*, Pope Pius XII said:

The assaults of wily enemies are numerous. Energetic vigilance is necessary to repel them. These enemies are the ambushes of Freemasonry, Protestant propaganda, the several forms of laicism, superstition and spiritism.

Such language speaking of Protestants as "wily enemies" and the need for "energetic vigilance . . . to repel them" was scarcely calculated to quench the fires of persecution of Protestants which were raging across Colombia at that moment.

In an address to the Second World Congress of the Lay Apostolate in October, 1957, Pope Pius XII said:

There are four mortal dangers which threaten the Church: the invasion of Protestant sects; the secularization of the whole system of life; Marxism, which is felt in the universities, and is most active and controls almost all of the workers organizations; and a troublesome spiritism.

When the supreme head of the Church places Protestant sects as the first of "mortal dangers" to the Church, it is easy to understand why some Colombians took on a religious fervor in their attempts to annihilate this "danger."

Alfred Cardinal Ottaviani, Pro-Secretary of the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, gave tacit Vatican blessing to the suppression of Protestants in Colombia in a speech on March 2, 1953. He praised the government of Spain for its heavy

restrictions on non-Catholic religions as he called on the rulers of other Catholic countries to impose official intolerance. He urged that sects not be allowed to "carry on propaganda which foments religious discord and disturbs the tranquil and unanimous possession of the truth and perseverance in the practice of religions. . . . It is the duty of the Rulers of a Catholic State to ward off everything that would tend to divide or weaken the religious unity of a people that has the unanimous conviction of being in the secure possession of religious truth."

He went on to state: "Quite frankly, two weights and two measures are to be employed, one for truth, the other for error." Full rights are to be given to the Catholic Church, but non-Catholics "cannot claim equal rights by reason of their error."

Dr. Goff states:

The importance of the Cardinal's speech for the Colombian Conservative Government and Roman Catholic Church cannot be overestimated. Here was backing from the Holy See for their policy of suppressing and restricting the rights of Protestants. . . . The speech, pronounced in the middle of the period of persecution, served as a green light for the anti-Protestant campaign in Colombia.

Several years before the violence broke out, the Colombian hierarchy was already paving the way for drastic measures against the Protestants. A collective pastoral letter of 1944 was signed by sixteen bishops and was to be read in every church in the country. The faithful were warned against Protestant ministers who came as "false prophets . . . in sheep's clothing, though underneath they are devouring wolves." They were told that "Protestants come to our country to carry out a work of destruction; they come not only to steal our faith . . . but to ruin our national and social structure." "To oppose Protestantism's labor of propaganda is not only the fulfilling of a duty imposed by the

Religion which we know comes from God, but an act of true patriotism."

Some practical measures which this opposition can take were described as the backing of Catholic Action, the avoidance of any contact with Protestants, and the devotion to Our Lady, "who has always killed off all heresies." This last phrase may well have stimulated the police and others who slaughtered Protestants to the shouts of "Long Live the Virgin!"

In 1944 Father Eugenio Restrepo Uribe published a book entitled *Protestantism in Colombia*. The book inspired fear of Protestants and encouraged their suppression. Father Restrepo referred to Protestants as "heralds of error," "undesirable foreigners," "heretics," and to the Protestant movement as a "virus," "plague," "invasion," "epidemic," "infiltration," and "infection." He exhorted Colombians to work for "the final extirpation of Protestantism from our midst."

As the violence spread, the vituperations grew in intensity. Names used publicly by priests in denouncing Protestants from their pulpits, over loudspeakers, and in pamphlets and articles included: dogs, pigs, devils, bandits, atheists, garbage, heretics, concubines, whores, exploiters, homosexuals, communists, vagabonds, revolutionaries, false prophets, rapacious wolves, and enemies of the Mother of God.

In 1944 Archbishop Ismael Perdomo organized an Anti-Protestant Committee in Bogotá. Similar committees were soon formed in other major cities around the country "to organize and direct the fight" against Protestants.

Another element in building up prejudices against Protestants was the compulsory classes of religion in every public school. Father Rafael Faria wrote the text on religion used in most of Colombia's high schools. The book, entitled *The Upper Course of Religion*, published in 1941 bore the Imprimatur of the Archbishop of Bogotá and a letter of approval from Pope Pius XII. (I have had to use this text, in accordance with government re-

quirements, in teaching a class in religion in our evangelical high school in Cartagena, Colombia.) The book had over one hundred references to errors and deceptions of Protestantism. The Spanish Inquisition and St. Bartholomew's Day massacre of Protestants were justified. Protestantism was decried as an enemy of liberty, and the author advocated that Protestant Bibles be seized and destroyed.

Since nearly every high school student in Colombia used this text in religion courses, its message permeates a very influential group of society.

This groundwork was laid over a period of years by the Vatican, the bishops of Colombia, and the clergy. It was only a short step for Conservative Catholics, in the midst of confused political civil war, to take advantage of the upheaval to carry out the instructions which their ecclesiastical superiors had been suggesting to them.

It is easy today to look back and eulogize the faith and courage of Colombians who suffered for their beliefs. But Dr. Goff reminds us: "Statistics cannot measure the anguish and suffering caused by the Protestant deaths. . . . The blood of the martyrs may be the seed of the Church; it also has consequences which blight and twist human lives."

Chapter 8

A Breath of Fresh Air

“**W**hat do Protestants believe about the Virgin?”

The questioner was a young university student with a keen mind and an open face. We had been discussing the differences between the Roman Catholic faith and the beliefs of Protestants. In answer to his question, I reached into my pocket and produced a New Testament from which I intended to read some verses. At the sight of the Testament my friend instantly jumped backward a step or two, throwing up his hands defensively.

“Don’t show me that!”

“Why not?”

“I couldn’t touch it!”

“But why couldn’t you?”

“They wouldn’t let me.”

“Who wouldn’t let you?”

“The priests.”

He had been trained in a Jesuit school from childhood, and deeply embedded in his mind was a fear of the Protestant Bible. It was a poison book produced by the Devil, he had been taught, and only evil could come from contact with it. Hence he was afraid of physical proximity to a Bible.

That was 1958. Five years later I stood in a book fair in front of the government buildings in the heart of Cartagena. For the first time in memory the Colombian Bible Society had received permission to put up a stall in the annual book fair sponsored by the Ministry of Education. The energetic young salesman was using a bullhorn to invite the people to step up and buy a Bible for five pesos (about fifty cents in gold currency at that time). He could scarcely keep up with the business as he passed out Bibles with one hand, took the buyer's money, and held his bullhorn in the other hand to carry on a running invitation that was attracting people by the hundreds. If the Bible was poison, as the people had been taught to believe, then they were willingly buying poison by the bushel. All over the city that week many people proudly carried a newly purchased Bible. For some it was the first time they had ever seen, let alone handled, a Bible, and they were seized with curiosity.

What had happened to produce such a change in attitude toward the Bible?

In January, 1959, Pope John XXIII had announced that he would call an ecumenical council, the first in nearly a century. When he was asked what the purpose of the council would be, the pope reportedly went to the windows of his office, threw them wide open, and said, "To let in a breath of fresh air."

One of the ways in which the fresh air was to come in was through a renewed study of the Bible. Another way was to be through dialogue with non-Roman Catholic Christians, previously referred to as heretics but now being called the "separated brethren." Over the past decade Colombian Catholics had become increasingly inquisitive about these people who were willing to stake their lives on their beliefs and who would die rather than give up the Book. They wondered what kind of faith this was, what kind of a Book it was.

Consequently, when the pope himself stated that the windows were to be opened, dialogue was to take place, and the Scriptures

were to be studied as never before, a revolution began to take place in Roman Catholic-Protestant relationships in Colombia. Catholics began to realize that Protestants did not have horns and forked tails, that the Bible was not poison, and that contact with the Bible and those who based their faith solely on this Book would not result in punishment. Protestants began to realize that not all Catholics were "*torquemadas*,"* that in fact most were quite normal human beings with whom they could converse in an attitude of respect and trust.

At first the change came slowly. Years of mutual distrust, fear, and bloody repression could not easily be overcome. But as the fresh air began to come in, there could be no return to the closed and musty atmosphere of yesterday.

Early in that period a Jesuit father in Cartagena with whom I became acquainted told me of his own increasing interest in the Scriptures. His words would have been the basis for discipline from his superiors a few years earlier. He said:

"For years I have studied and analyzed the writings of the Church Fathers, the books on dogma and theology, and other official Church documents. But recently, for the first time in my life, I have begun to study the Bible. I find it a wonderfully refreshing book. Now when I return to my books on dogma and theology and try to read them, it is like chewing on straw."

Another Jesuit priest stopped me on the street in Cartagena one day and asked when we could get together to study the Bible and discuss our respective beliefs. I knew that during the years of violence this man had been responsible for some drastic and repressive measures against the Protestants, including the stoning of a church and the writing of some inflammatory pamphlets advocating the suppression of this "heresy." But when he asked if we could talk together about the Word of God I was glad to

* Tomás de Torquemada was the founder of the Spanish Inquisition

accept. We made a date and spent several hours of profitable discussion together.

This particular Jesuit was rapidly becoming a leader in the Bible study movement among Catholic laymen throughout the country. He had organized a lay study group in his church, and before long he invited some of us from the Latin America Mission to attend the study. He made it plain that we could not only attend but were free to participate in the discussion of the Bible. We went, and soon became acquainted with numerous individuals who would never have crossed the threshold of a Protestant church previously and who would have been very suspicious had we entered their church.

One day my Jesuit friend called and asked if I would be willing to lead his Bible study the following week. The annual fiestas were about to begin. This would be a five-day carnival celebrating Cartagena's declaration of independence from Spain. While many aspects of the carnival were innocent and legitimate forms of amusement, such as parades, contests, folk dancing, and musical events, much of it would degenerate into general debauchery with drinking, all-night carousing in the streets, knife fights, and other side effects. The priest was concerned to prepare his people to resist the temptations that would surround them during this week. He asked if I would give them a Bible study on "The Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of the World." Beyond assigning the topic he placed no restrictions on what I could say or do.

At the appointed time I found that a group of approximately one hundred persons had gathered, mostly laymen but with a goodly number of priests and nuns also in attendance. After presenting the biblical teachings on the topic, I opened the floor for discussion, and a stimulating and profitable exchange ensued.

During this same period LAM missionary Richard Boss was becoming increasingly active in showing evangelical films in the Protestant churches. He had several films produced by different

organizations such as the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Our Jesuit friend became curious about these and asked if he could see one. Dick invited him to a showing in one of the local churches. He was so impressed with the film *Lucia*, a dramatic true-life story of the conversion of a high society woman in Argentina during a Billy Graham Crusade, that he asked to have it shown in his own church. Dick was happy to comply. There followed a series of invitations to Catholic churches, schools, hospitals, and other locations. Even the Archbishop of Cartagena attended a private showing of *Lucia*, bringing seventy priests and nuns with him. They all watched attentively as the story developed and as Billy Graham preached two sermons at different times in the story.

One evening a knock came at the door of our home in Cartagena. There stood a young priest whom I had never seen before and whose accent immediately betrayed him as a European. He turned out to be a missionary priest from Belgium who had obtained my name from a friend in Bogotá when he was to be transferred to Cartagena. He had come to make our acquaintance and to indicate his desire for dialogue and study of the Scriptures. He was assigned by the bishop to teach religion in the largest Catholic high school in the city. I was fascinated as our conversation developed and I saw how open-minded this young man was and how earnestly he was seeking the truth of God. In his religion classes he had done a revolutionary thing. Forsaking the prescribed textbook, he told his students to bring a Bible to class. When they protested that a Bible was too expensive (a Catholic Bible cost fifty pesos and up at that time), he instructed them to buy a Protestant Bible for five pesos and bring it to class.

"It's all the same to me," he explained to the students as he pointed out that the differences between the two Bibles were really minimal and that, apart from the question of the Apoc-

ryphal books, it was mainly a matter of choice of words in the translations.

We had several encouraging contacts with this young priest. But it wasn't long before he was transferred to another country and we lost track of him.

For nearly ten years in Cartagena I had used the same barbershop. The barber, while very amiable, never showed the slightest interest in religion. Occasionally, I gave him a small Scripture portion to read, but it evoked no response. Then in April, 1968, I went to the shop on a return visit to Colombia. During our conversation he said,

"Do you have Bibles for sale?"

"Yes, of course."

"Can you bring one for me to buy? I've noticed that everyone else is reading the Bible and talking about it these days, and I guess it's time I got in on the show. I'd like to find out for myself what this is all about."

This response was typical of the attitude that has built up in recent years. As I have tried to analyze the reasons for the change, it seems that certain factors were active.

First, a desire to know more about these strange Protestants who could stand up to persecutions and even die as martyrs if necessary.

Second, a sense of deep curiosity about this Book upon which these people staked their faith and which had previously been forbidden to the Catholics. If the pope himself was advocating study of the Scriptures, and dialogue with non-Catholics, what could hinder the laity from complying?

Third, a feeling of shame and remorse over the sufferings of Protestants during the violence and a desire to atone for this treatment.

Fourth and perhaps most important, a sense of spiritual hunger and a desire to meet God personally. Protestants claimed

to know God in personal terms. They talked to Him directly and not through an intermediary. They claimed to know that they would meet Christ in person after death without passing through various stages before entering His presence. Whether Catholics considered this faith as right or wrong, there was unquestionably a desire to discover more about this personal relationship to God through Jesus Christ.

Yes, the breath of fresh air is blowing strongly through the country of Colombia.

Part 3



Chapter 9

The Seed of the Church

“**I**saias, where did you first come in contact with the gospel?”

I was sitting on the bamboo floor of the round Indian house built on stilts. We were looking out over the waters of the San Jorge River rushing by the lush jungle-lined banks. Isaias Domicó and his brother, Manuel, had invited Ernie Fowler and me to spend time with them teaching the Word of God.

“I heard the gospel down the river in Juan José. Ricardo Vélez and the other believers there explained it to me, and I received Christ under their teaching.”

Who was Ricardo Vélez? He had been for more than a decade a teacher and pastor of the Gospel Missionary Union in the state of Valle in southern Colombia. His faithful witness made him a prime target of those who hoped to silence the testimony of the gospel. On four different occasions Ricardo suffered violent personal attacks. Twice he was left for dead, once with his skull laid open from a machete blow. Others in his congregation suffered similar attacks.

By 1957 it seemed wise to withdraw from the area where their lives and properties were in constant danger. Under the leadership of Ricardo, a small band of believers made their way

through the Andes ranges. They found refuge in the forests of the upper San Jorge River in the state of Córdoba in northern Colombia. Settling in the frontier village of Juan José, these believers hacked farms out of the virgin jungle and settled down to a quieter life.

Their zeal for the Lord could not be kept quiet. Consequently, they soon formed a small congregation that became a focal point of future expansion. It was here that Isaias and Manuel Domicó, Eperá Indians, met Christ as Savior. They were now anxious to evangelize their own tribe and had asked Ernie Fowler and me to give them instruction in the Word. The gospel was about to spread in a hitherto unreached tribal area as the result of the witness of persons displaced by the persecutions.

Persecution has generally had at least three major effects on the church of Christ. First, the church is purified. Those who are not willing to suffer for their faith are purged out. Second, the church is unified. Those who hold firmly to their faith are drawn together in a unity which emphasizes their bonds in Christ and gives them mutual strength. Third, the church is scattered, thus spreading the seed of the gospel.

All three of these effects were experienced to a remarkable degree in Colombia. The church that emerged was purged, united, and approximately doubled in size, in spite of losses through martyrdom and apostasy.

Sometimes persecution has had a fourth effect, namely, the decimation of leadership. The pastors and leaders of the church become the direct objects of attack and sometimes are eliminated. The laymen must then move in to fill the gap. During the period of persecution the evangelical church in Colombia witnessed a spontaneous rise of untrained but dedicated laymen to positions of leadership in the church. When a pastor was imprisoned or banished from his area of work, or perhaps killed, others had to take his place. Thus by the end of a decade of

violence there was a rising tide of a strong lay movement. This coincided with what can only be described as a sovereign work of the Spirit of God in awakening laymen all over the country to their responsibility within the church. Quite apart from the effects of the persecution, a few men here and there were beginning to assume leadership both in founding and in pastoring congregations in rural areas. At first this was an almost imperceptible ripple, but it was soon to swell into a great wave of lay leadership which was to engulf entire areas.

The witness of Ricardo Vélez and the believers in Juan José, planting the seed of the gospel in the heart of Indians, is typical of what happened throughout Colombia. The congregation in Juan José became the upper arm of a vast pincers movement for the gospel that embraced almost the entire San Jorge River basin.

About the same time that God was leading Ricardo Vélez and his band of persecuted Christians into Córdoba, He was also beginning to move in a mysterious way in the lower reaches of the San Jorge River basin. The preparations for this movement of the Spirit of God go back to the earlier days of the persecution.

It was a typically hot and humid day in 1949 when Rev. Pedro Gutiérrez, veteran pastor of the Association of Evangelical Churches of the Caribbean, rode on horseback over the dusty road to Providencia. This village had become notorious as a refuge for outlaws where "they kill without a license." That evening Pedro preached and sold Bibles. An inquisitive young man named Victor Landero, attracted by the people who had gathered, edged his way into the crowd. He asked a bystander, "What is that book he is selling?"

"Why, that is a book which will tell you how God made the world."

His natural curiosity got the better of him, and he bought a Bible. Since he could neither read nor write, the Bible was soon

relegated to a box in a corner of his farmhouse where it was destined to lie untouched for eight years.

Victor earned his living in two ways: the family farm, plus a house of ill fame with a bar, dance hall, and prostitutes. He cohabited with three women (one on his farm, one in his brothel, and one in the next village) without being married to any one of them. Drunken brawls were common in his daily life, since a hot temper was one of his traits.

Somehow during the next few years Victor learned to read, in spite of the fact that he never attended school formally.

One day in 1957 Victor was rummaging through the old box in the corner of his house and came upon the long-forgotten book entitled *Holy Bible*. Dusting it off, he sat down on a sack of rice in front of his house to leaf through the pages of God's Word. Unwittingly he was handling dynamite that would soon explode and revolutionize his life. As he sat there reading, a friend happened by.

"What's that book you are reading, Victor?"

"This is a Bible."

"Oh, a Bible! So you're an evangelical now?"

"No. But I found this old Bible and am reading it."

With a few more comments, the friend turned and went on down the road.

Eliecer Benavides had found Christ several years earlier through the witness of the same Rev. Pedro Gutiérrez who had sold the Bible to Victor Landero. Eliecer had subsequently registered in the Caribbean Bible Center in Sincelejo to prepare to serve the Lord. I first met him when I delivered the address in 1955 at Eliecer's graduation. This humble and somewhat reticent young man made a deep impression on me at that time.

A few days after Victor Landero had first begun to read the Bible, Eliecer ventured into Nueva Estación, Victor's village. There were no believers in that region, so Eliecer had picked it as a target of evangelization. Figuring that if he could find some-

one with a Bible he would have a starting point from which to work, Eliecer asked around in the village plaza if anyone owned a Bible. The man who several days earlier had seen Victor reading his Bible happened to be present. He spoke up.

"Why, yes," he said, "I saw a fellow just the other day reading a Bible up the road there," and he pointed to Victor's home.

Eliecer went up the road and found Victor sitting in front of his thatch-roofed hut, reading. After initial introductions, Eliecer asked, "Is it true that you have a Bible?"

"Yes," replied Victor, and promptly produced it from inside his house.

"Do you understand it when you read it?"

"No, hardly at all."

"Would you be interested in some help in understanding it?"

"Certainly! Come in!"

The two men sat down together with the open Bible between them. Eliecer began to explain in simple terms the message of the gospel. This was all new to Victor, and he was not yet able or ready to comprehend it.

As the weeks went by, Eliecer returned occasionally to visit and tell him more of God's love for him—an idea that fascinated Victor. In his desire to please Eliecer and show his hospitality, Victor always put his latest records of wild dance music on his honky-tonk jukebox as a special welcome!

With great patience Eliecer expounded the truths of God's Word, applying them to Victor's life. Finally, the day came when Victor's spiritual understanding was opened by the Spirit of God.

He had gone to the next village to replenish his supply of rum, and was returning along the road with his burro loaded with the cases of liquor. The conviction of sin which had been growing in his heart became so great that he could no longer resist. He led his burro off into the grass at the side of the road and knelt down alone. There he cried out to God in confession of sin and recognition of his need of a Savior.

He rose from his knees with a light and joyful heart. As he

continued his way along the road toward home, he sensed the new life which had already begun. Even the world around him seemed to change. The surrounding countryside with its proliferation of bird life and vegetation took on new meaning because he saw in nature the handiwork of the Creator who had now become real to him.

Chapter 10

Growing in Grace

Formidable problems confronted Victor Landero upon his arrival back home. As the proprietor of a house of ill fame, and with three common-law wives, he had some rearranging to do. He could not turn to a more mature Christian for guidance, since there were no other Christians in the area. Eliecer Benavides continued to visit him from time to time, but he was living elsewhere and could not provide the regular fellowship and teaching which Victor so desperately needed.

"He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." "I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. . . ." "When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all truth."

Victor Landero did not know of these promises at the time of his conversion, but he experienced their truth from the very beginning of his Christian life. The Holy Spirit took the Word of God, as Victor read it searchingly, and applied it to his life.

One of his first decisions was to become a monogamist, so he dismissed two of his three women. (He has never explained to me how he decided which one to keep!) It also occurred to him that living off the proceeds of a brothel was not a felicitous

arrangement for a Christian. So he dismissed the prostitutes, closed the bar and dance hall, and converted his establishment into a general store.

He continued to drink for a time after his conversion. Then one day, while holding a bottle of rum in one hand and interrupting his witness with swigs, he was speaking of the gospel to a customer in his store. The man broke in, "So you are an evangelical, Victor?"

"Yes sir, I certainly am."

"Then what are you doing with that bottle of rum in your hand?"

"Why not? What's wrong with that?"

"Well, all the evangelicals I know won't drink."

"Why not?"

"I'm not sure, but I guess they figure it's not right for them or good for their bodies."

"If that's the case, I won't drink either."

And he set aside the half-finished bottle, never to touch liquor again.

Victor was also concerned about the proper use of the Lord's Day. Through a study of the New Testament he had become aware that the early Christians dedicated Sunday to the Lord. He always spent that day in his general store, which was a center for the surrounding area. It was the biggest day for business. Farmers came to town on Saturday with their produce to sell in the market. On Sunday they stocked up for the coming week by buying their staples with the proceeds of their sales. Monday was the slowest day of the week in business. The dilemma was a very real one. Should he close the store on Sunday, thus endangering his business? Or should he keep it open at the expense of his spiritual growth through worship?

As he struggled with this concern, he carried on a running argument in his heart with the Lord who, he was convinced, was indicating that he should close the store. As he tells it: "Finally I

struck a bargain with the Lord: I would close the store for one Sunday. If the experiment worked, I might do it again. If it didn't work, the Lord was not ask me to do it again. So with fear and trembling, I closed the store one Sunday, amidst the warnings of friends that this would by my ruination.

"Then I opened on Monday—the poorest day of the week for business—expecting the worst. That Monday I sold twice as much as I had ever sold on any day before! From that day on I learned that 'them that honour me I will honour.' I never again questioned the Lord when He asked me to do something that didn't seem logical to me."

Making bargains with the Lord was one of the ways in which Victor grew. Several years later he had given up his store and was farming full time in another area. He decided to try another bargain. He told the Lord that one day in the week already belonged to Him, but that he would be willing to make a fifty-fifty bargain for the other six days. If the Lord would help him keep his farm in order and his family sustained with three days a week of work, then he would dedicate the other three days to the Lord for evangelistic outreach. Thus four days a week would be given to the Lord, including Sunday. When describing how the bargain came out, he said with a twinkle in his eye, "It worked out so well that I found I could keep my farm going with only two days a week of work, leaving five days to give to the Lord!"

The simplicity with which these people accepted the Word of God at face value was one secret of their growth. Whatever the Scriptures said was taken in its literal interpretation without doubt or question.

One day Victor started off with a companion on an evangelistic trip to another area. He spent the night with a friend named Alfredo, to whom he explained the purpose of his trip. Alfredo, also a believer, asked if he could accompany them.

"No, you can't go along."

"Why not?"

"Because I already have a companion."

"So what? What's that got to do with it?"

"You ought to know better than to ask that. Don't you remember that when Christ sent out His disciples to preach, He sent them two by two, not three by three? So you can't go with us."

Alfredo accepted this reasoning, asking only that he be allowed to go along on the next trip as Victor's companion.

One morning I was sitting in Victor's farmhouse conversing with him, while his wife prepared lunch over the open fire. At one point she sent a boy up a ladder to get a sheaf of crude rice from the rows hanging from the beams of the thatch roof. As the boy was about to take one down, Victor interrupted our conversation, saying,

"Just a minute! Don't take it from that row. That belongs to the Lord. Take it from this row over here."

So the boy moved the ladder and got rice from another row.

Later I questioned Victor about the row that he said belonged to the Lord.

"That is my first fruits," he explained. "I read in the Bible that the first fruits were consecrated to the Lord. So the first part of my harvest is always set aside for the Lord."

"What do you do with that rice?"

"I sell it. Then I give the money to the church in a special offering which we use to finance our evangelistic trips."

As far as I know Victor had never heard a message on tithing. But the simple meaning of the word "first fruits" was clear enough to him. He followed the biblical precept, teaching the other believers to do the same.

The family altar became a daily part of the Landero household, and thus of the homes of many others who came to know Christ. It was a spontaneous desire to meet with the Lord, rather

than any specific instruction on the need for family altar or daily devotions, that sparked this development.

I recall my first visit to the Landero home in Corozal, a clearing in the deep forest, where Victor had moved to witness for Christ in an area where the gospel had never been preached. At that time the clearing had four houses, with a few others scattered in the nearby woods.

On my first evening there about sixty believers gathered for worship, fellowship, and teaching. It was rare at that time to be visited by an outsider, and they were eager for all the teaching they could get. Following the service, we sat around for several hours discussing the Bible. I tried to answer the many questions they had stored up for the next preacher or missionary who would come.

Then Victor spoke up: "Before we break up tonight, let's decide about our morning worship. How will it be if, instead of having family devotions at home as we usually do, we all come to the chapel to meet with David for an early morning service?"

General agreement was expressed, and the hour had to be determined.

"What time shall we meet?"

"How about five A.M.?"

My heart sank. I had traveled most of the day on horseback. I was weary from the long evening of teaching and talking, and it was past midnight.

"No, that doesn't suit me too well," suggested one believer.

My hopes rose a bit; it didn't suit me too well either!

". . . four-thirty would be better for me."

My heart sank lower than ever!

It was agreed that 4:30 would be the best time to meet. They asked if that was all right with me. I consented, on the condition that they wake me up. I lost no time in hanging my hammock under a roof near the chapel, and was soon dead to the world.

The next morning (or rather the same morning!) I was aroused by the sound of singing. As I struggled up from the depths of exhausted slumber, I realized that the singing was coming from a family moving along the path toward the chapel. A father, mother, and numerous children tagging along were singing hymns as they went. Then I noticed that other families were arriving from various directions and heading for the chapel, also singing as they went.

Soon a large group gathered, not to meet with me, but with the Lord in prayer and study of His Word. We continued until 6:00 A.M., when the men headed off to their fields and the women to their household chores. Throughout the day I could hear different men singing hymns, one as he built a house, another as he cultivated corn in a nearby valley, and another as he felled a tree. Each one was carrying with him the joy that had come from starting the day in worship.

We were not to meet in the chapel the following morning, but once again I was awakened about 4:30. This time I could hear singing, prayer, or Bible reading coming from the little huts nearby. Each father had gathered his family in the predawn darkness for worship. As I lay in my hammock listening to murmurs of prayer and singing as they blended with the screech of parrots and the call of the howler monkeys, I was thankful for the privilege of being with people whose love for the Lord was manifested in this way.

Love for the Lord produced a corresponding faith in the Lord. One of Victor's brothers, Gregorio Landero, invited me during Easter week of 1961 to Tierradentro, far up the San Jorge River. He had gone there seven months earlier to establish a witness for Christ. About thirty believers now formed a nucleus of a church, and they invited people from the area to spend the week with them. One hundred and fifty people showed up and had to be fed for the week.

By Thursday the food supply was running low. In desperation Gregorio took three men and their fish net up a tributary river in hopes of getting enough fish to provide for the large crowd. Like the disciples of old, they toiled all afternoon and took nothing. By late afternoon they were about to give up in despair when Gregorio persuaded them to cast the net one more time. With a prayer of faith they cast it out, each man getting on one of the four corners in order to draw it in.

Suddenly one man shouted, "Come to this corner quickly! I have a *bagre*!" This giant catfish sometimes reaches four or five feet in length.

But a second man shouted, "No, come to my corner! I have a *bagre*!"

Then the third shouted that he had one! And finally Gregorio too shouted that he had a *bagre* in his corner of the net! Four giant catfish in one cast!

I shall not soon forget the scene as the men returned to the little chapel. A group of worried women in an improvised outdoor kitchen were preparing a scanty meal for one hundred and fifty people. The men staggered in, each one bent under the weight of a huge fish slung over his shoulder. They threw the fish on the ground amidst cries of delight and told how the Lord had honored their faith.

A few days later as I was being poled down the river on a balsa raft and lolling lazily in the afternoon sun, I heard a shout from the shore. It was Manuel Herrera, a new believer who lived on an isolated farm where he had no fellowship with other Christians. He was urging me to tie up at shore and invited me to have dinner in his home. I was happy to accept.

After dinner Manuel pulled out a well-thumbed Bible and asked me to read to him, as he could not read. I read aloud two chapters. Then he got out a small notebook which had several pages filled with check marks. He made two more checks. When I

inquired about this, he replied that every time anyone read him a chapter from the Bible, he put a check mark in the notebook. Since his conversion two years before, he had read one hundred and sixty chapters of the Bible in this way.

Manuel also had a unique form of witnessing. Since he could not read, he would take his Bible to a friend and say, "You know I can't read. But I have a book here, and I'm wondering if you would read me some of it."

"Yes, I'd be glad to. What part shall I read?"

"Well, find a book called The Gospel of John . . . Now find chapter three and read it to me."

After John 3 was read, Manuel would say, "Do you know what that is about?"

"No, I don't understand it fully."

"Well, let me tell you . . ."

And he was launched into a session of personal witness for his Lord.

In 1963 Victor Landero, with a group of ten men and women from his area, visited the city of Cartagena. This was his first trip to the coastal port. He had seen a large city only on two or three brief occasions previously. Cartagena was constructed by the Spaniards in 1533 as a port for trading and a gateway to the riches of South America. The Conquistadores defended it well with the largest fort in the Western Hemisphere and sturdy walls to protect the city from pirates. These walls still surround the center of the city.

In a pickup truck I took Victor and his companions on a tour of Cartagena. As we drove up to the center of the city, Victor got his first view of the walls. He mused,

"So this is what a walled city looks like! Then this must be what Jericho was like! Imagine the faith it would take to march around walls like that and expect them to come tumbling down!"

Later we drove up on top of the walls, where there is room for several cars abreast. Victor queried, "Wasn't it Nineveh that had walls so wide that chariots could drive side by side on top of them? So this must be like Nineveh!"

As we stood on top of the walls looking out across the Caribbean, with waves dashing against the rocks below, Victor got his first glimpse of the ocean.

"Wow! There's a good bit of water there!" was his first remark.

Then as he contemplated the vast expanse of blue, and the thunder of the waves against the rocky shore, he continued, "Imagine the power it would take to walk out on water like that! And imagine what power would be needed to tell those waves to be still, and then to see them calm down immediately!"

It is not surprising that such a saturation in the Scriptures would produce the help needed in times of crisis. Several years after Victor had established a church in Corozal, a divisive spirit developed among the believers there. Victor immediately saw the danger. He recognized that unless God intervened, the group might divide in bitterness and collapse in failure. Since he was not trained in pastoral theology, he turned to his only recourse. He went off alone in the woods to study the Bible and pray for a solution.

As he prayed and read the Word, he came across I Samuel 7 where the people of Israel were threatened by the Philistines. In the hour of crisis Samuel invited the people out to Mizpah for a day of prayer, fasting, and confession. As Israel sought God, He delivered them and won a great victory over their enemies. It occurred to Victor that what the people of Corozal needed was another "Mizpah." He returned to the village and called the believers together to explain his plan.

Those who were willing to pray and fast in seeking a solution to their problems were to meet with him in a clearing in the woods near the village. In order to be sure that no one came who

was not sincere in his efforts to follow the Lord, Victor set the hour for 1:00 A.M.!

He recounts: "I went to bed early that night, wondering if anyone would actually show up at such an unearthly hour. I arose sometime after midnight and made my way out to the clearing. It is no small matter to walk through the snake-infested jungles at that time of night, and I had real doubts about how many would do it. I arrived at 'Mizpah' to find that the entire village had already preceded me. Many had risen at midnight so as not to miss the one A.M. rendezvous."

They gave themselves to prayer, fasting, and study of the Word throughout the night and most of the next day. The result was a great visitation of the Spirit of God in their midst. The divided factions were reconciled. In thanksgiving to God for what He did that day, they have now designated this clearing as "Mizpah." Every Thursday is spent in prayer and fasting in that spot for those who care to meet.

Once again god was demonstrating that "them that honour me I will honour." They can testify with Samuel in the original Mizpah, "Ebenezer . . . hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

Chapter 11

“Go Home and Tell Your Friends...”

The Landero family was composed of ten brothers and sisters who immediately after his conversion became the object of Victor's desire to share his newfound faith. One after another, upon seeing the drastic change in Victor's life, was willing to listen to his testimony. And one after another put his faith in Christ. To this day they are all faithfully following the Lord and are actively engaged in lay witness. One of them, Gregorio, is among the most effective pastors in the entire region.

One afternoon as Victor and I were traveling together in a canoe on the San Jorge River, I began to question him concerning his early experiences in witnessing. Victor is not a talkative man, nor is he particularly forward in referring to himself. But with a little prodding, especially when we have been alone together on a trip, he will open up and share what God has done. On this occasion he told me of his first attempts to witness.

“In those early days I talked about the gospel to everyone who came into my general store. As I weighed out a pound of rice or a sack of sugar, I would speak to the customer about Christ. It got

to the place where I would talk all day long about Christ. In fact, there were days when I went to bed with a hoarse voice because of having talked so steadily about the Lord during the day."

As time went on Victor and his brothers established a small congregation on their jointly owned farm, "La Victoria," near the village of Nueva Estación. Before long this group was growing in faith and in the knowledge of the Lord.

Then Victor, as did the lepers in the camp of the Syrians (II Kings 7), began to realize this was a day of good tidings and the news must be shared. Calling his brothers together, Victor proposed that they continue with the leadership of the congregation in La Victoria, while he would settle somewhere up the San Jorge River and begin a witness. He was pretty certain that the gospel had never been preached in that area. He felt that by purchasing a plot of ground for farming, he could witness to the other inhabitants of the region. His brothers agreed to the proposal, and it was executed.

Moving to the San Pedro River, a tributary of the San Jorge, Victor started visiting in the town of Puerto Libertador. He had no friends or contacts, and was unable to witness directly. In relating this, he says, "For the first six days in that area I found no one to whom I could speak of Christ. Imagine! Six whole days without witnessing to one soul for Christ! I thought I would burst!"

Door-to-door visitation began to acquaint him with the people of the town. Soon his unadorned sincerity won him friends to whom he spoke of Christ. The beginnings of a church in Puerto Libertador were in process.

Surveying the area, Victor decided to buy land from Calixto Amante, a farmer who owned a large tract which he had named Corozal. Calixto is an open-faced man with a winsome smile whose genuiness is contagious. He was not a Christian, but was glad to have Victor settle in Corozal and farm the land he had bought. Through the witness of another young believer who had

visited him, added to the influence of Victor's presence, Calixto soon gave himself to the Lord and became a key man in the establishing of the church.

Although Corozal in those days was but a small clearing, it soon became a focal point in the work of the Spirit of God in the lives of many people. Why God chose this unknown clearing as His place to begin a great movement of people to Himself is one of those mysteries unexplainable in human terms. That He did so is confirmed by the dozens of congregations and hundreds, even thousands, of believers scattered today over a broad countryside.

During Easter Week of 1964 I was traveling up the San Jorge River in a dugout canoe with outboard motor with my two boys, David, Jr., and Stephen (ages eleven and nine at that time, respectively). When darkness overtook us, the driver tied up at the riverbank to seek shelter for the night. As we asked a farmer where we could hang our hammocks, he recognized us as evangelicals and referred us to a nearby hut. Coming up the hill toward a thatch hut, we heard hymn singing. Approaching the door, we found a group of about eight men standing around in a circle with Bibles and hymnbooks. Their singing was miserably off-key but wonderfully happy.

We introduced ourselves and joined them for their evening worship service which had just begun. Warm embraces were exchanged, for, although we had never met, we were received as brothers in the Lord. (A common greeting among Christians in rural Colombia is for the individual to give his name first; then he often adds, "One more brother in Christ.")

Following the service, in which they asked me to lead a Bible study, I questioned them about various things. This was a spot I had never heard of before. They had never heard of me nor of the Latin America Mission. They had received the gospel through the witness of nearby farmers, who in turn had heard it

from others. The spiritual genealogy traced back to Victor Landero and the men of Corozal.

This story could be repeated many times over. Frequently, as I have traveled by mule, dugout canoe, or foot through isolated areas, I have asked the question, "Where did you people first hear the gospel?" Almost invariably the answer is, "Victor Landero visited us last year," or "The brethren from Corozal were here six months ago."

Robert Reed of the Latin America Mission was the first missionary to discover, in 1958, what was going on in these areas. He correctly analyzed the movement as "spontaneous combustion." The rapid spread of the gospel could not be traced to normal channels nor to missionaries or trained pastors.

In March, 1967, I attended a gathering of one hundred believers in the little village of Tiatira. In one of the Bible studies I asked how many had become Christians through the witness of an ordained pastor or a missionary. Not one hand was raised. Then I asked how many had heard the gospel through a layman such as a friend or neighboring farmer. Every hand went up!

This is evangelism in the definition of D. T. Niles of India, "One beggar telling another beggar where to find bread."

God, not being bound by our preconceived notions of how He must work, meets these uneducated people on the level of their need. Take, for example, the matter of dreams. I was always conditioned to feel that dreams are of no account in my life but rather may reflect inward thoughts or possible desires. But the God who spoke to Abraham, Jacob, Peter, and Paul through visions is still sovereign. Does He not have a right to communicate to His people again in this way, if He so chooses, especially if they are illiterate?

About two years after settling in Corozal, Victor Landero had a dream in which he saw a hut in the woods. Every detail of it was clear—the roof, the fence, the gate with two posts in front. In

the dream he heard a voice saying, "The people in that hut are dying without Christ because no one ever told them of Him." This was repeated twice. Upon awaking, Victor sensed that God was telling him to find that place and give the people the gospel, but he put it from his mind as nothing more than a routine dream.

Nevertheless, the conviction grew that God was trying to speak to him. That voice kept repeating itself in his mind. Day after day, week after week, month after month, he tried to forget it, but to no avail.

Finally, after eight months of resistance, he told his wife he was going off on a trip to find that place and give the people the gospel. His daughter happened to be seriously ill that day, and they thought she might die. Victor reasoned that if she died, she would go to heaven, because she knew Christ. But if the people in that hut died, they wouldn't go to heaven, as no one had ever told them of Christ. So he commended his daughter to the Lord in prayer (she later recovered), took a companion, and started off.

He felt like Abraham when "he went out, not knowing where he was to go." He had no idea in what direction to head; he only knew that God would lead him.

On his second day of travel he stepped out of the woods into a cleared area—and there was the hut exactly as he had seen it in his dream! The roof, the fence, the gate were all the same.

Knocking on the door, he explained to the woman who answered that he would like her permission to invite her neighbors in to talk that night about the gospel. The woman stood there astounded, scarcely able to speak. Three nights before, she had also had a dream in which she saw her house jammed with people. A stranger with a book in his hand talked to them about something he called the "gospel" (which she had never heard of before). He taught them songs which he called "gospel hymns." Now here was this strange man asking permission to use her place to give

the gospel to her friends! She granted his request.

That night twenty-four people jammed into the one-room hut. Victor, reading from the Bible, explained the message of salvation. When he asked how many would like to receive Christ, every hand went up. Thinking that they had misunderstood, he started all over and gave the full story again. Once more every person present indicated a desire to receive Christ. So Victor prayed with them, inviting them back the next night. Thirty-four people came, including the original twenty-four. All ten of the new ones also received Christ.

With thirty-four new believers on hand, Victor gave them some instruction for two or three days, left a Bible, and returned home. One is tempted to ask, "What becomes of a group like that? Do they mature and grow? Or do they, because they have no leader, dwindle away?" A year after Victor's visit, I spent one night with them, holding a service in the thatch chapel which they had now constructed. There were about fifty believers in the group, as they had led others to Christ. I asked how often they met in the chapel (thinking of our traditions of Sunday services, Wednesday evening prayer meeting, Saturday night youth meeting). They did not understand my inquiry at first. When I finally made it clear, they seemed surprised that anyone would ask anything so foolish.

"Why, we meet every night!"

"What do you do when you meet?"

"Well, those who can read, read the Bible to us. Then we all talk about it. Then we sing and pray together."

Here was a church in the true New Testament sense of the term, a group of believers gathering together in Christ's name around His Word to worship and learn of Him.

The next morning I held family devotions in several different homes, including the one Victor had seen in his dream. It was with reluctance that I left that band of Christians to visit other villages. Their contagious love for the Lord had struck deeply into my heart.

One morning I was traveling along a trail with Adán Ricardo, a leading member of the Puerto Libertador Church. His radiant testimony was proof of his love for the Lord, so I asked him how he came to know Christ.

He replied, "You know, I can't read. So I couldn't find Christ through reading the Bible. Victor Landero tried to witness to me, but I refused to listen and turned away from him. Then one night I had a dream. Christ came along the road and confronted me, saying that I was a sinner and needed Him. I turned my back on Him and woke up. The next night I had the same dream. Again Christ met me on the road. I could turn my back on Victor, but I couldn't continue to turn my back on Christ. This time I listened to Him. When I woke up, I realized that what He said was true, and I received Him."

In 1961 Victor had spent six months studying in the Caribbean Bible Center in Sincelejo, the only formal education he ever had. While there he became impressed with the impact being made by the students going out on weekend evangelistic assignments.

He realized that in Corozal he was carrying the burden alone, not training others for witness. Upon returning to Corozal, he organized what he called "the campaign." This was a movement to get all the men in the Corozal church involved in preaching in unreached areas or new congregations.

On Thursday night he would gather them to lay plans for the weekend. Two by two the men were assigned to the nearby villages of La Clara, Uré, Filadelfia, La Rica, Villa Nueva, Quebrada Nueva, and many others. Some of the men had to walk up to eight hours through mud and jungles, crossing rivers, climbing hills. All day Saturday was given to travel. Services were held Saturday night and Sunday. Then all day Monday was spent returning to their homes. Thus three days a week were given to this outreach.

One Thursday I watched Victor organizing the weekend activities. When he asked one man if he would go to a certain

spot, the man hesitated for a moment. In a loving and understanding way Victor said, "Brother, remember what the Lord said, 'Let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart.' And remember that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

The man replied, "I'll go."

Whereupon Victor said, "Praise the Lord! The brother says he'll go. Let's all sing that chorus, 'I'll go, I'll go, I'll go,' to encourage him as he goes this weekend."

The follow-up of new converts was done faithfully. During Easter Week of 1963 I was in Corozal for special services. About six hundred people came from the surrounding countryside for a week of Bible study and fellowship. During that time eighteen people became Christians.

A year later Calixto Amante (by this time pastor of the Corozal church) informed me that all eighteen were going on with the Lord. Many of them were engaged in evangelistic outreach. In March, 1967, I met one of this original group who was now serving as the lay pastor in Uré. The other believers, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, had taken these new ones under their care to cultivate their spiritual growth.

I was always curious to hear how Victor would testify to a person in his endeavors to lead him to Christ. That opportunity came when Victor invited me to accompany him to an Indian settlement in the woods beyond Corozal. We arrived in the village about noon. It was a cluster of round, well-constructed houses on stilts called *tambos*. Most of the Indians spoke only their own dialect, which we, of course, could not speak. But two or three of the men spoke some Spanish, as a result of their contacts with civilization.

As we visited in the *tambo* of one Indian who spoke Spanish and seemed to be a leader among his people, Victor turned and asked me to tell him about God. This was the opportunity I had

been hoping for. I insisted that Victor talk to him. After voicing some objections, saying that I knew more than he did, Victor finally consented. Turning to the Indian, he said,

"Do you know who Jesus Christ is?"

"No."

"Do you know what the Bible is?"

"No."

"Do you know what sin is?"

"No."

"Have you ever heard of Adam and Eve?"

"No."

"Do you know anything about God?"

"No."

Where would he begin with a man like that? I thought to myself. But without hesitation Victor continued,

"God is the one who made the world. He put two people in the world—Adam and Eve. He told them they could have everything they wanted except the fruit from one tree. And what do you suppose they did? They took the one thing God had told them not to touch! That was disobeying God. That is called sin. So God had to punish them.

"Every man who has lived since then has sinned against God. But God still loved the people He had made. He wanted to do something for them. God had one Son up in heaven. He decided to send that Son to earth to help the men He had made."

Pulling out his Testament, Victor turned to John 3:16. He read it slowly, clearly, and with appropriate comments. He pointed out that God's love led Him to give the one Son he had; that this Son gave His life as the punishment for sin; that anyone who wants forgiveness can believe in this Son, whose name is Jesus Christ; and that those who believe will live forever in heaven.

I listened spellbound to this elementary exposition of the gospel. An uneducated farmer was giving as clear an explanation

of the great theological truths of the Bible as I had ever heard. I thanked God for letting me hear this man give the gospel to an Indian who had never heard it.

Victor was not the only man in the church who was active in this type of witness. But he was the catalyst. He followed several steps in his own witness. First, he never ceased to share his faith with others, urging them to commit their lives to Christ and receive forgiveness of sins. Second, when others took this step, Victor was faithful in teaching them all he could about God and the Christian life. Third, he organized the witness of the church so as to utilize all the resources within the church in total outreach. Fourth, he stayed with new believers until a church or congregation was established.

Victor once told me that he had a rule of thumb in witnessing in a new village. He figured that if he visited a place five times, remaining each time for unhurried teaching of the Scriptures, he should have a congregation established so that they could continue on their own.

"How does this work out in practice, Victor?" I inquired.

"So far it has worked every time. After five visits I have been able to lead enough people to the Lord and train at least one layman to become responsible for the group so that I can move on elsewhere."

These men who trained under the guidance and example of Victor today are lay pastors and workers throughout a vast region. Calixto Amante, now pastor of the church in Corozal, has so won the confidence and love of the people in his area that he has risen to be the recognized leader, even when Victor is around. Victor is the first to recognize differing gifts. He knows that his gift is that of an evangelist, whereas Calixto is more gifted as a pastor. Victor's brother, Gregorio, is noted for his gift of faith and of proclamation of the Word. He is a better preacher than Victor. The list of men who today are witnessing faithfully



Missionary Ernest Fowler in 1943, during a visit to the Indians of Irapa. The wild turkey in his hand was shot for food. One of his companions, missionary Harvey Hammond, died of malaria at this site. (See Chapter 2.)



A group of Yukpa Indians of Eroca welcome Ernie Fowler. His twenty-five-year dream of translating the Bible into their language was beset with repeated frustrations.



LEFT: Yukpa Indian Chief Papa Marte serves as an informant as Ernie and missionary colleague Carl Lehmann take notes on the difficult language.



ABOVE: A new sound greets the ears of Yukpa Indians as author David Howard plays a hymn on the cornet.

BETWEEN: Ernie Fowler, with characteristic grin, enjoys a conversation with Papa Marte.





ABOVE: Ancient Indian carvings on a rock in Eroca are examined by author. Their original meanings have not been deciphered.

BELOW: Author contemplates the peaceful mountains surrounding Eroca, which belie the bloody tragedy that occurred in August 1966. Ernie Fowler, who was murdered by a group of bandits, is buried a few yards away from this spot.





ABOVE: Victor Landero, an active layman, reached out through a vast area to spread the gospel among Colombians and Indians. He stands before the first evangelical chapel in Corozal, which he constructed with the aid of fellow believers. (See Chapter 11.)

BELLOW: Pedro Gutiérrez, Colombian pastor who pioneered in establishing churches in the states of Bolívar and Córdoba. He is well remembered as one of the founders and long-time president of the Association of Evangelical Churches of the Caribbean. He sold the Bible to Victor Landero, which paved the way to Victor's conversion. (See Chapter 9.)





Three modes of transportation in the
San Jorge River area:
Balsa raft and dugout canoes.
Large dugouts with outboard motors.
Pack mules and horses.





ABOVE: On the trail to Corozal, Kenneth Strachan, Gregorio Landero, lay pastor and brother of Victor, and Adán Ricardo, who was converted through a dream. (See Chapter 11.)

RIGHT: Victor Landero holds the attention of Kenneth Strachan. The late General Director of the Latin America Mission had an insatiable desire to learn all he could from others.



BETWEEN: Mizpah, a clearing in the woods, became a regular meeting place for the believers of Corozal. Victor Landero, shown gesturing at left, leads Bible study during a day of prayer and fasting. Four other Landero brothers are among those present. (See Chapter 10.)





LEFT: The first evangelical chapel in Corozal was soon outgrown and replaced by a more formidable structure. In this picture missionary Robert Reed is handing shingles to Calixto Amante, pastor of the church. Eventually an even larger building became necessary.

RIGHT: Victor Landero always took advantage of a visit by a missionary for Bible study and prayer together. Here he shares experiences and insights with author.

BELOW: An Indian *tambo* in the forest beyond Corozal is entered by climbing a notched log. The *tambo* is built on stilts as a sanitary measure and for protection against animals. Victor Landero is about to evangelize an Eperá Indian. (See Chapter 11.)



for Christ would be far too long to mention here. Each one recognizes his part as a member of the Body of Christ in cooperating with the others as together they pool their gifts in total mobilization and outreach.

In the midst of blessing on every side, Victor found one great restriction in his life. He was not legally married, although he had lived faithfully since his conversion with the woman by whom he now had a number of children. Legal marriage in Colombia must be performed either through the Roman Catholic Church or through a civil ceremony. The Protestant church ceremony alone is unacceptable to the laws of the land. The Catholic ceremony usually requires religious acts which evangelicals are unwilling to perform. Civil marriage is a long, complicated process of red tape which often takes many months to complete.

Victor had been faced with endless delays in getting his papers and consequently had not been able to legalize his relationship. Thus he was not baptized and could not participate in the Lord's Supper or enjoy certain other privileges. The Colombian church has been very strict in maintaining standards of church membership.

On Easter Sunday of 1963 I baptized twenty-five new believers in a brook that passes through Corozal. Victor stood to one side as these brethren stepped into the water, nearly all of them spiritual children of his. Following the baptism, we took the Lord's Supper in the chapel. Again Victor sat to the side, unable to participate. He was troubled.

The next day Victor joined me on the two-day journey to the nearest county seat where a municipal judge could administer the civil ceremony. For Victor this was the eighth trip in his effort to fulfill legal steps for marriage. We were accompanied by his common-law wife, Teresa, and several of his children.

Arriving in the town of Montelíbano early on Tuesday after-

noon, we went immediately to the judge's office. In typical Latin style we were told to return "*mañana*." After some persuasion the judge agreed to finalize the papers at 5:00 P.M. We utilized the intervening time to make hasty preparations for the church ceremony and also to find a suitable spot for baptism. We returned to the judge's office promptly at 5:00 P.M. After a short ceremony and signing of papers, the civil marriage was completed.

From there we went to the evangelical chapel of Montelibano for the church wedding. A group of about thirty believers had gathered. I stood at the front of the rustic structure, dressed in tennis shoes, old trousers, and sport shirt, while the bride finished nursing her baby at the back of the church. One of the older daughters took the baby from her mother's arms and the wedding party moved up the aisle. As Victor and Teresa completed the vows, I pronounced them man and wife in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Following the ceremony we all went to a nearby pasture, where Victor and I had earlier found a stream with a hole deep enough for baptism. We stood in the dark, for by this time it was about 8:00 P.M. There on the bank of the stream we sang some hymns and, with the aid of a flashlight, I read some Scripture.

I invited Victor to step into the water, but before he did so he requested that we sing the last hymn over again. He then turned his back to the group singing on the bank, stretched out his hands and raised his face toward heaven. As we sang, I could hear him talking earnestly to the Lord. He was saying how thankful he was that this moment had at last arrived, when he could follow the Lord in baptism. As he stepped into the water, I felt an overwhelming unworthiness to baptize this man upon whom God had so singularly placed His hand. His wife followed, and likewise evidenced the joy of that moment.

Returning to the chapel, we found the preparations for the Lord's Supper complete. It was a solemn occasion as we passed

the elements which commemorate the body and blood of our Lord. As Victor Landero, God's instrument in the salvation of hundreds of Colombians, participated for the first time in this remembrance feast, tears of joy and gratitude flowed freely.

Victor had indeed traveled a long road since he had knelt in the grass beside his burro in the country.

Part 4



“The Wind Blows Where It Wills”

The woods were humming with the sounds of bees and insects, the singing of the brilliantly colored tropical birds, the screech of parrots as they flew overhead in pairs, and the occasional call of a howler monkey in the distance. Victor Landero and I sat on a log, discussing the growth of the church.

“David, I’ve been concerned in noticing the Great Commission in Mark 16. To the best of our ability we have obeyed the command of verse 15 to preach the gospel to every creature. But verses 17 and 18 promise five signs that will follow those who preach the gospel. I have been asking the Lord why we have not seen these signs following our preaching, and He has begun to show them to us.

“We have now seen three of these signs accompanying our witness: some demons have been cast out, some have spoken in new tongues, some have laid their hands on the sick and they have recovered. So far we haven’t seen the other two signs [picking up serpents or drinking some deadly thing and recovering].

“Any day now one of our believers will be bitten by a snake [a

common occurrence in those parts of Colombia], and he will not die but will be healed. Then one of our children will drink something poison by mistake, and he will recover. We fully expect God to honor His Word and allow us to see all five signs following our preaching."

My immediate reaction was one of skepticism. It was all too easy to say, "Unless I see . . . I will not believe." It was soon to become evident to me however, that the Spirit of God was moving, as the wind blowing where it wills, doing His work in His own way.

It was in public prayer that we first began to notice things to which we were not accustomed. Many of the country people are illiterate, making it impossible for them to have the kind of family or personal devotions so common in our evangelical culture. How can one exhort an illiterate to read the Bible daily? These people found their outlet for worship and their source of inspiration in group prayer meetings.

Gathering early in the morning, they would pray together. The exuberance of their love for the Lord often made it difficult to keep quiet while someone else droned on in prayer. It wasn't long before others started to pray simultaneously. Then a great murmur of prayer would rise as all joined their voices in worship, praise, and petition. With prayer meetings starting at 4:30 or 5:00 A.M., this type of prayer often had the advantage of helping to keep people awake.

Praying in unison soon provoked opposition. Some of the older believers, unaccustomed to this, rejected it as extremism or pentecostalism, and they wanted nothing to do with it. One veteran pastor, whose leadership in the churches was greatly respected, stated emphatically that praying in unison was *not* prayer. He forbade it in his church. Another pastor, equally influential in leadership and spiritual insight, stated that while this might not be the only way to pray, it was certainly the best. He encouraged it in his church.

Such differences produced friction when the believers gathered for conferences. At the 1964 convention of the Association of Evangelical Churches of the Caribbean, scores of believers from all the churches were present. A delegate from one of the older churches stood up and requested that prayer in unison be condemned formally. This was strongly resisted by the newer churches. Then the delegate stood again and, pointing at me, said,

"All right. I'd like to ask the director of the Latin America Mission to tell us if prayer in unison is biblical or not," implying that any pronouncement from me should be taken as a final decree!

My answer was summarized with the thought, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (II Cor. 3:17).

One side benefit which sometimes came in such prayer meetings was to hear what others were praying about. In 1964 I was in the village of Tierradentro for several days of Bible conference. My first visit there had been in 1961, when the gospel was just penetrating this newly settled area. During a group prayer session I overhead the man next to me praying earnestly for me. He was saying:

"Lord, I want to thank you for bringing David back to our village. You know that the first time he visited us I was not a Christian yet. I was his enemy. I opposed him with all my force. I hated him. But now I am his brother in the Lord. So I thank you for bringing him back and allowing me to receive him as a brother and not as an enemy, and for letting me hear his teaching."

As Victor had indicated in speaking of Mark 16, certain charismatic gifts were also being manifested. The truths of I Corinthians 12 on the "varieties of gifts" which are given as the "manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" were being experienced. The Spirit was apportioning "to each one individually as he wills."

At this point many of us felt like Peter in Acts 10. He received the vision of the great sheet filled with unclean animals descending from heaven. A voice commanded him to rise and eat. Peter knew his Old Testament theology too well to violate the laws of ceremonial cleanliness. Yet he was told three times, "What God has cleansed, you must not call common." God was preparing him for a broadening of his understanding of the eternal purposes of God. Peter was about to become God's instrument for opening the door of faith to the Gentiles, an idea totally foreign to the Jews. He must learn that God's ways were far beyond his limited comprehension. Peter was not wholly mistaken in his understanding of the Old Testament; his understanding did not go far enough.

When the Spirit of God began to do things beyond the scope of our theological system, we were forced to listen as Peter did in Acts 10. God wanted to show us that He is sovereign, and that our understanding of His ways was too limited. If He chose to give charismatic gifts of tongues, or of healing, or of casting out of demons, for the edification of His church, did He not have a right to do so? Who were we to tell God what He could do?

Slowly, God removed our skepticism, confirming the gifts of the Spirit by showing the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of the believers who received these gifts. These people were demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit as outlined in Galatians 5:22, 23. They showed more love, joy, peace, and other Christian attributes than many Christians who have known the Lord for years.

When the Spirit of God began to work, the Devil was not far behind. One day Victor was taking me visiting in the homes of Corozal. At that time there were ninety-four people living there, ninety-two of whom were professing Christians. We visited the home of one of the unbelievers, a young girl of about twenty. During the visit Victor turned to her and asked,

"When are you going to give yourself to the Lord? You know

the gospel. You see the fruits of it in the lives of your family and friends. You know you are not happy and that you need Christ. Why don't you give yourself to Him?"

Her only response was a supercilious smile. As we walked away from that home, Victor questioned me about this.

"How is it possible for a person to live in the midst of a community like this, hearing the gospel day after day, seeing the results of the gospel in changed lives, and still not turn to the Lord?"

We discussed for a few moments how the god of this world blinds the minds of the unbelievers, "to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (II Cor. 4:4). Then Victor said,

"Yes, it's like what happens in a flood on the river here. Each man has his canoe tied up at the bank. But when a flash flood comes, canoes are often broken loose from their moorings and swept down the river. If I have a canoe there, and I see others being swept away, I'll run to the riverbank and tie up tightly the canoe that remains, so as not to lose it. I think this is what Satan is doing here. He sees the flood of the gospel sweeping all of his canoes down the river. So he is tying up more tightly than ever the few that remain in his power."

The church that had successfully survived the persecutions and was growing rapidly as a result, now encountered a different type of enemy within its own ranks. The Devil, in his guise as "a roaring lion" (I Pet. 5:8), had failed to decimate the church through outward attacks. Now he changed his tactics and appeared as "an angel of light" (II Cor. 11:14), deceiving from within in order to confuse, divide, and destroy. Christ Himself warned of this when He said,

"Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name,

and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers'" (Matt. 7:21-3). "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect." (Matt. 24:24).

Chapter 13

“Angel of Light”

My first encounter with the charismatic movement in the states of Córdoba and Bolívar, both genuine and spurious, came during Easter week of 1963. The movement had been growing before this, but I had not seen it personally. Bob and Fran Reed, LAM missionaries who tirelessly covered the San Jorge River in a teaching and nursing ministry, along with Aimee McQuilkin who worked with them, had been reporting great increase in charismatic gifts. This involved speaking in tongues, healing, and casting out of demons. They also reported ominous signs of demonic activities and counterfeits of true gifts of the Spirit.

On the Monday preceding Easter I began the three-day trip from Cartagena to Corozal. I was very apprehensive, as I could not be sure how I would react in the face of demon activity. Wednesday morning, before starting the last lap of the trip into the woods with several Colombian believers and Aimee McQuilkin, I read Isaiah 50:7, “For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.”

We discovered upon arriving in Corozal that about six hundred people had gathered from all over the countryside for the

Easter week Bible conference. Some had walked for two days through mud and jungle to get there.

Immediately, we sensed a spirit of excitement and anticipation. The previous night a young man, a stranger to the believers, had spoken up, claiming to be a prophet from the Lord. Speaking partly in tongues, he said that on Good Friday there would be great signs and wonders performed, and that he would have a special revelation from God for this conference. When we arrived, he was off in the woods supposedly receiving this revelation.

That night as I preached the opening message, this man sat in the front row and made his presence very evident, shouting loud "Amens" and "Hallelujas." Thursday at the early prayer meeting (which started at 3:45 A.M. that day), he prayed loudly over one woman in an attempt to cast out a demon. No visible result could be observed. Later, he prayed that I would not doubt the marvels that were to take place on Friday. He also prayed that I would have the same joy which he had, and that I would not take any medicines while there but would trust only in the "medicine of the Holy Spirit."

On Thursday night, he drew me aside after the evening message. He grasped my arms and looked deeply into my eyes with a weird look that would have made me shudder had I not been conscious of peace from the Lord. He asked if I had ever seen the Lord heal a person. When I replied affirmatively, he seemed taken aback.

Then he told me of the special "revelation" he had received from the Lord on Wednesday. He claimed that God had given him three new things to say: first, there would be great apostasy in the last days; second, we need to love the Lord more; third . . . and at that point he forgot what the third revelation was.

Earlier that day, feeling that a showdown was inevitable, I had asked the Lord for wisdom in answering this fellow. Luke 12:11, 12 came to mind: ". . . do not be anxious how or what you are to

answer or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought say."

So I said, "You have no right to tell me that God has given you a new revelation. What you have said has been written in the Bible for two thousand years. You are treading on dangerous ground when you claim that God has given you a new word. Don't talk to me about a new revelation."

With a subdued grunt, he turned away.

On Good Friday afternoon he again sat in the front row. When an invitation for salvation was given, to which a number responded, Victor Landero came forward to give them instructions. While he was speaking the young man began to pray in a very loud voice. Since Victor was unable to finish his instructions to the new believers, he went to the man and rebuked him strongly. At first the man resisted, claiming that, as a prophet from the Lord, he would pray whenever the Lord told him to pray, and no man could make him keep quiet. However, Victor continued to rebuke him until he backed down and apologized for what he had done.

On Easter Sunday, during the communion service, this man began to rock back and forth on his bench, breathing heavily as though he were going to explode in tongues or some new vision. Calixto Amante of the Corozal church ordered him out. Toward the close of the service, he returned to his seat.

A short time later he suddenly toppled over backward, landing in the lap of the man behind him. The closing hymn was announced, and as the congregation stood, the man in whose lap he had fallen shoved him rudely to his feet, saying, "Get up!"

As we started to sing, the young man raised his hands in the air, eyes rolling, and began to sway and sink to the floor. He lay there in a heap as we closed the service. When he realized that he had attracted no attention, he got up and went out. Those who had seen him in action believed he was possessed by the spirit of a false prophet, as Christ predicted for the latter days.

This man soon disappeared from Corozal and never caused any further problems. It was as though Satan withdrew in defeat.

About this time other types of demonic opposition began to manifest themselves. Manuel Sena, who was baptized during that Easter week conference, had been a sorcerer before his conversion. With the use of little fetishes he practiced a type of black magic. Following his conversion, he gave up his former life and all of its vestiges, except for one metal fetish which he kept in the house. He secretly guarded this, wrapped in a cloth, inside a jar, in a box. None of the other believers knew this when they approved him for baptism.

Manuel was bothered by certain problems involving demon possession, so a few months after his baptism, he went to Corozal to ask the men there to pray for him. That night, as they prayed with him, Manuel was thrown to the ground, foaming at the mouth. Then he went into a coma for a brief period.

While in the coma, Manuel spoke out in a voice foreign to him. The voice revealed that he still kept the magic charm in his home. When he returned to his senses, Victor asked if this was true. Manuel confessed that it was.

The next morning Manuel, his son Francisco, and Victor Landero went to Manuel's home several miles away in the woods. On their arrival Francisco's wife met them in a distraught state. With no idea of what had taken place the previous night in Corozal, she told them a hair-raising story.

Apparently at the same hour when the men were praying for Manuel, the dog in his house suddenly began to bark furiously. Francisco's wife having gone to bed, felt a strange and terrifying presence which seemed to come from the box that held the fetish. In cold fear she knelt on the bed and prayed. The dog rushed around the room as though being pursued, and she continued in prayer. Finally the dog calmed down and went outside, the sense of terror left her, and she got back into bed.

The men opened the box. Taking out the jar, they unwrapped the cloth in which the charm had been kept and discovered nothing but powder! The metal fetish had disintegrated. From that day on Manuel was liberated from these dark powers.

A more subtle type of confusion came from within the church itself. Since the Latin temperament is emotional, it is not surprising that the experience of speaking in tongues was appealing to the believers. Those who were granted a genuine charismatic gift sometimes accepted it as being God's way of meeting their personal need. But more often they felt this was something which every believer must experience as the sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Others who did not receive it began to seek a charismatic experience. Overt efforts were mounted to try to produce certain gifts, especially that of speaking in tongues.

Sometimes an outward manifestation came which was taken as a genuine gift, such as a babbling or clicking of the tongue, a gush of air, or a bubbling of saliva. The difference between the true gift and the spurious imitation was usually clear, but many failed to discern it. Any outward display was accepted by many as a gift of the Holy Spirit. The person who produced it was exalted to a higher spiritual plane than others. There was a failure to recognize that Satan himself can imitate the gifts but not the fruit of the Spirit.

This took on bizarre proportions at times. A person whose moral life was atrocious (for reasons of marital infidelity or shady business dealings) would manifest some outward experience. He had supposedly had a baptism of the Holy Spirit. Many uninstructed believers would overlook the gross sin in his life and accept him as a Spirit-filled man.

The most acute example of this type took place in the town of El Carmen, Bolívar. A new pastor, placed there early in 1963, began to preach on the Holy Spirit to the exclusion of all other aspects of Christian doctrine. He stated that he was going to do

this until the entire church was filled with the Spirit. This meant, by his definition, that all must have some outward manifestations. When these did not come immediately, he preached all the harder, trying to work them up by physical exertions.

Prayer meetings were organized in private homes and held behind locked doors. Every conceivable method was used to produce outward evidence of spiritual power. There was a great deal of loud shouting, some vomiting and rolling on the floor. On a few occasions things became so violent that neighbors tried to force the doors to find out what kind of a riot was ensuing.

On Saturday, July 6, 1963, a young man named Osvaldo came to the pastor, saying that he had received the baptism of the Spirit. He asked permission to lead the Saturday night prayer meeting. This was granted, and Osvaldo took over.

As he led the singing, he began to dance around with a wild look in his eyes, urging the believers to show their joy by more noise. When it came time to pray, he circulated among the pews, insisting that everyone pray louder. He poked some, hit others with a hymnbook, and generally insisted on more noise as evidence of the fullness of the Spirit. Those who would not shout in prayer were branded as unspiritual.

Finally the more mature Christians, no longer able to tolerate this kind of superficiality, withdrew to another part of the church to hold a more orderly prayer meeting. They were brokenhearted over what was happening to the testimony of the church and the unity of its members. The pastor became alarmed, realizing that he had lost control of what he had fomented.

Many who saw Osvaldo in action, including the pastor, said that he must have been demon-possessed. They spoke of the wild look in his eyes—a look which they had never seen before in any person. It was a greatly sobered church that gathered for worship the next day and heard Osvaldo testify that he had given himself over to the power of Satan.

Unfortunately, the sobering influence did not last. The elders

of the church, in despair over the situation, requested me to come to El Carmen with a commission from the Association of Evangelical Churches of the Caribbean. I was aware of what had been happening because June Siegfried, LAM missionary nurse living in El Carmen, had kept me informed by telephone of developments.

On Monday, July 8, I went to El Carmen with Santander Pineda, president of the Association, and veteran pastor Pedro Gutiérrez, to counsel the pastor and the church. In a private session the pastor received our counseling well. However, in a meeting with the church that evening he completely reversed himself and took an arrogant and aggressive position. He defended Osvaldo and attacked us openly, mocking us as unspiritual and thus rejecting our efforts to help. His discourteous treatment of Pedro Gutiérrez, who had been one of his spiritual mentors, was beyond all bounds of decent conduct.

Following the church meeting, Pedro, Santander, and I went to the pastor's home to try once more to counsel him privately. We were with him until after midnight with no noticeable success.

Conditions worsened. On July 26 the Administrative Committee of the Association held a special session in El Carmen. After consultation with the church it was decided that the pastor would have to be removed. Fortunately, I was away in Bogotá and absent from that meeting. Had I been present the Latin America Mission would have been open to the charge of foreign missionaries forcing the removal of a national pastor. As it was, the entire action was taken by the church and the Administrative Committee with no missionaries participating.

One of the earliest believers in El Carmen was Rafael Yepes. He received the Lord under the ministry of Dennis Crespo, LAM missionary who opened the work there in 1955. Through the years Rafael had been a steady worker for the Lord, providing leadership in the church and school. Most of his family had become Christians and were showing real progress. Throughout

the convulsions which the church suffered in this period, Rafael had remained a stanch supporter of the church and a foe of extremism.

The pastor made Rafael Yepes one of his prime targets of attack because Rafael was not going along with the efforts for outward manifestations. One night he led a group to Rafael's house to sing to him "Sinner, Come to Jesus" and other invitation hymns. In a letter to me dated July 22, 1963, Rafael Yepes asks, "Does the pastor believe . . . that we are not believers, and so he is inviting us to Christ?"

Following the removal of the pastor, some of his supporters suggested that God would punish Rafael Yepes for his resistance to the Holy Spirit.

Then on August 1 there came one of those strange happenings which defy adequate explanation and which compounded the confusion and deepened the wounds. Rafael Yepes was out in his patio at 4:45 A.M. in a violent thunder and lightning storm when he was suddenly struck dead. It was an hour before the storm abated sufficiently to enable his wife and the nurse, June Siegfried, to reach him. At first they thought that he was hit by a bolt of lightning, but later wondered if the lightning might not have triggered a heart attack.

Upon receiving the news that morning in Cartagena, I drove the eighty miles to El Carmen with two of Rafael's sons who were students in our Christian high school. A number of others also went along. His funeral that afternoon was one of the largest I have ever seen in Latin America. He was a highly respected man in the community.

His wife showed great composure and trust in the Lord during this trial, even when it was implied to her that Rafael had committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit, and therefore God had punished him with death! The truth is that Rafael in his personal life had shown far more fruit of the Spirit such as love, gentleness, and meekness than had most of those whose

claim to being filled with the Spirit was based on an emotional manifestation.

The mystery of his death still remains shrouded in the inscrutable counsels of God. I wrote at that time to our General Director, Kenneth Strachan, about this experience. He responded with an encouraging word, ending up with Isaiah 50:10, "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." William Cowper's hymn often came to mind in those days:

God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

....

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.

The Latin America Mission was caught in a cross-fire. Its efforts to help the churches accept their responsibility for self-government had made major strides, and the churches were responding well. Now, said various individuals, the Mission was responsible, as founder of the work, to move in with a strong hand and halt the charismatic movement. Some accused the Mission of being unspiritual because the missionaries were not speaking in tongues; still others said that the Mission did not know what it believed and was vacillating.

Our position was delicate. We were firmly convinced that God was moving in an outpouring of His Spirit. We wanted to avoid being guilty of quenching the Spirit. On the other hand, we could see the extremes and imitations, both psychological and satanic, and we felt obligated to help curb them. But in doing so we had to be careful not to undermine the recent efforts to get the church to handle its own affairs. A highhanded move by the Mission would have denied all that we had been saying about self-government.

The annual convention of the church Association was held in Sincelejo in January, 1964. By this time the confusion and divisions over the charismatic movement, with its mingling of great blessing and spurious extremes, were rampant. I discovered, upon arriving at the convention, that the business agenda included the topic, "Position of the Association and the Latin America Mission in view of the pentecostalism that has arisen." My name was listed as speaker for that session, which would be held the following afternoon!

I had had no opportunity for preparation of the Mission position, nor could I now consult with the Field Council or other Mission leaders. But it seemed like a God-given opportunity to clarify our position. I accepted the assignment and squeezed in what little preparation I could before my presentation.

One hour before I was to speak, I asked the missionaries present and two visitors, Robert Lazear, who was the Bible teacher for the week, and David Fischer, a seminary student from the states who was visiting the mission field, to join me in special prayer. I had never borne a greater burden as I contemplated the entire future of the work.

There had already been some tense exchanges on the convention floor. A few more sparks of disagreement might now ignite a conflagration that could destroy the entire Association. For the Mission to take sides and alienate one group or the other could

be fatal. Yet we had a responsibility to declare what we believed to be the biblical teaching on the work of the Holy Spirit in the church. How to do this without causing a split was the great problem. At times I wondered if I could bear it.

As we prayed together, seeking the Lord's strength, He spoke to us in an unusual yet unmistakable way. A word of prophecy was given as follows:

Am I not sovereign, saith the Lord?
Are not these my people?
Do I not look down on them with eyes of love?

I have put upon you my yoke for them,
And is not my yoke easy, saith the Lord?
For I am in the yoke with you shouldering my burden.

Rest in me;
Look unto me;
I will shepherd my people,
For I am willing and able to watch over my flock.

As with Bunyan's Christian at the cross, I felt the burden rolling from my shoulders. God had indicated that I must bear my part of the yoke, but that He was in the yoke with me. The work was His, and these people were His. They were not my flock, but His, and He would be responsible for shepherding them.

I went from that prayer meeting to the business session where delegates from all the churches were waiting expectantly. As I stood before them, with the prayers of my colleagues upholding me, I spoke with a sense of liberty and power.*

Following the session, there were comments from all sides that the Lord had moved in our midst. There seemed to be the be-

* The substance of this message is contained in the statement quoted on pp. 160-166.

ginnings of a new spirit of unity and a willingness to work together.

The policy of the apostolic church was helpful to us at this time. In the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, Peter, Paul, and Barnabas reported the experiences God had given them among the Gentiles. James balanced this by applying Scripture to the experiences. ("With this the words of the prophets agree. . . .") The early church thus found its guidelines by combining its own experience and interpreting this by the Word of God (and vice versa). It became our task in Colombia to try to do likewise.

By April 1964, I was able to write to Kenneth Strachan, after a trip into an area that had been fanatical in its extremism:

I was very pleasantly surprised to see how things seem to be balancing off, and it may be that the past year was an initial period of overenthusiasm and exuberance which carried many of the brethren to extremes on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. However, it seems that some of the more stable men . . . have been learning and trying to put into practice the things the Lord has been teaching them.

These men were digging into the Word of God as the basis of their experiences, and thus finding the true source of spiritual power. The growing pains of a maturing church were taking effect.

In subsequent months I drew up a paper to provide some guidelines for LAM workers and missionaries facing this crisis. While not an official declaration of Mission policy, it outlined what we believe the Scriptures teach and what our responsibility should be in helping the churches. After an introductory statement on the charismatic movement, the paper continued:

In view of this situation we wish to state as clearly as possible our understanding of the teachings of the Word of

God on such matters and how we strive to apply these teachings in our ministry.

I. The Bible is the Word of God in its entirety and its truths must be ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Christ warned the Sadducees, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God" (Matt. 22:29). While Christ was speaking of a specific doctrinal issue here, He was certainly enunciating a basic principle, namely, the tension or balance between the written Word of God in its doctrinal presentation and the power of the Spirit of God in applying that Word. These two factors must always be kept paramount in our ministry: *the Word of God* as the basis for all our work and teachings, and *the power of God* in our lives as we minister His Word to others. The Word of God without His accompanying power in our lives becomes ineffective; the power of God in our experience, unless grounded in the Word of God, may be misunderstood and thus lead into error. We seek a holy combination of God's Word enacted in power in our daily lives and ministry by His Spirit.

II. The continual infilling of the Holy Spirit is indispensable to an effective ministry of the Word of God.

We wish to be open to whatever the fullness of the Spirit may mean for us. We recognize that the Spirit of God may choose, in His sovereignty, to work in ways which we may not have anticipated but which will always be in accord with the clear teachings of God's Word.

This happened to the Apostle Peter in Acts 10 in the case of Cornelius. Peter's understanding of the Scriptures was

incomplete at that time, and he was forced to re-evaluate his interpretations in the light of what God wanted to do for the Gentiles. It was *the power of God* coming upon Cornelius and his household that forced Peter to recognize his own deficiency in understanding *the Word of God*. God's Word had not changed, but Peter's understanding of it had.

We seek before God to preach and teach His Word as He enables us to understand it. If, in the course of our ministry, the Holy Spirit chooses to do unexpected things, we accept this as the power of God, which will always be manifested in accord with the Word of God.

The Bible exhorts us to "be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). This will come in harmony with and through the application of God's Word. When this fullness is accompanied by gifts of the Spirit, we rejoice with all those who are blessed by such gifts and accept them as part of God's plan for the edification of the Body of Christ.

We purpose, therefore, with God's help to "follow after . . . reaching forth unto those things which are before, . . . press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:12-14). Then we can say with Paul, "And if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you" (Phil. 3:15). Thus, if God wishes to reveal Himself afresh through His power, in accord with His unchangeable Word, we stand ready to admit our own limited understandings and to receive any new infilling which He wants to give us.

III. Openness to the true work of the Holy Spirit must be accompanied by a diligent effort to guard against errors and excesses, false teachings and practices:

This statement requires an amplification in the following terms:

1. We believe that the gifts of the Spirit enumerated in Romans 12, I Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4 may be apportioned to every man as the Spirit wills. If the Spirit chooses to manifest any or all of these gifts in our day, we accept this as part of His sovereign plan for the church.
2. At the same time we do not believe that every outward manifestation of a so-called "gift" is necessarily from the Spirit of God. On the contrary the Bible teaches that the opposite is true. "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:22, 23). "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matt. 24:24). Thus the Devil may counterfeit the gifts of the Spirit, and this requires constant vigilance on our part, warning and instructing our brethren against such errors.
3. No single gift of the Spirit is the indispensable sign of the fullness of the Spirit. Some teach earnestly that speaking in tongues will accompany the true fullness or baptism of the Holy Spirit. We believe the Bible teaches that tongues are given to some for edification (I Cor. 14:4, 5) but not to all (I Cor. 12:10, 30). Whether tongues be viewed as a gift or a sign, or both, the Bible nowhere teaches that all believers must experience this phenomenon. That some do is undeniable. That other Spirit-filled believers do not is equally true. The teaching that tongues *must* accompany the baptism of the Spirit is a divisive doctrine which often leads to a subtle spiritual pride for some and frustration for others.

The Epistles of the New Testament were written to explain and interpret the historical events recorded in the Gospels and Acts, providing the doctrinal basis of our faith. The Epistles have much to say about the fullness of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, but nowhere do the Epistles teach that tongues must accompany this fullness. What took place at Pentecost (Acts 2), in the household of Cornelius (Acts 10), and among the Ephesians (Acts 19) are historical events with a given purpose at that particular time. That such events must necessarily be duplicated in the experience of every believer is nowhere taught in Scripture, while the Bible does clearly teach that every believer should be filled with the Spirit who indwells him.

In all the Epistles, from Romans to Jude, speaking in tongues is referred to only in I Corinthians 12-14. If this gift or sign were necessary for every believer, it is odd that the New Testament puts such little stress on it. It is likewise odd that the only church where Paul dealt with this matter in writing was the Church of Corinth. Here was every kind of sin and vice: divisions, contentions, carnal practices, fornication which could scarcely be mentioned for its perversion, criticism of leaders, marital tangles, brother going to law against brother, profaning of the Lord's table, etc. Hardly a picture of Spirit-filled believers! By contrast we have no evidence that the Philippian church, for example, where love and joy were the dominant notes, ever experienced tongues in their midst. Were they not filled with the Spirit? All nine *fruits* of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23) are to be manifested in the life of every believer, but nowhere do we find that all the *gifts* (or even any specific gift) must be demonstrated by every believer. If this were true, the teaching of the "Body of Christ," with

its many members exercising different functions, each dependent on the other, would lose its significance. Each gift contributes to the edification of others, but not all members are expected to exercise every gift.

Any attempt to induce the outward manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit (e.g., the use of unknown phrases to start the flow of speaking in tongues) is a fleshly effort which can result in grave errors. The Holy Spirit does not need our human interventions in order to bestow upon us His gifts. What He desires is a humble and contrite heart which is submitted in complete surrender to Himself.

4. The exercise of the gifts of the Spirit must be done "decently and in order" (I Cor. 14:40), for "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace" (I Cor. 14:33). Where disorderliness results, there has either been a counterfeiting work of Satan or a misunderstanding of the true manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

IV. Exaltation of the Person of Christ that men may turn to Him and grow in Him is the primary aim of the ministry of the Word of God.

The history of Christianity is replete with the sad stories of heretical movements within the church which have lost their Scriptural bearings by failing to focus constantly on the Person of Christ. The Bible is Christocentric. Christ is the Author and Finisher of our faith, and we look to Him as such. Christ says of the Comforter, "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come . . . he shall glorify me" (John 16:13, 14). It is the work of the Spirit to glorify Christ and not Himself. Therefore, any emphasis on the Spirit of God which tends to minimize or exclude the Person of Christ is an incorrect interpretation of the Scriptures.

Failure to focus properly on Christ not only leads to errors of understanding the work of the Spirit; it also can result in a misunderstanding of Satan and his work. One extreme is to neglect Satan, for all practical purposes, and proceed as if he did not really exist. This allows for the Devil to operate unnoticed. Another extreme is to overemphasize the Devil and his works, attributing far too much to him and his emissaries. This turns our attention from Christ to the enemy of Christ. Paul warns, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (I Tim. 4:1). We do well to heed that warning today.

Great care should be taken not to attribute to Satan or his demons sins which are really the result of the lust of the individual. There is grave danger in attributing to demons activities which the Word of God specifically calls "the works the flesh" (Gal. 5:19-21). Any excusing of sin or attempt to deal with sin by exorcising of demons, instead of dealing with the sin itself (such as lust, hatred, jealousy, etc.) in the life of the believer, is avoiding the true issue. Such an approach tends to minimize sin and the responsibility of the individual. "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (Jas. 1:14).

Conclusion.

Keeping in mind the guidelines delineated above, the Latin America Mission in Colombia purposes to continue in the work to which God has called us as long as God Himself so indicates. . . .

To this end it is our earnest prayer that God will make us faithful to Himself (including His Son and His Spirit), to His Word, which will always be our guide, and to His people, to whom He has called us.

Part 5



Chapter 14

“How Are the Mighty Fallen”

With the failure of Satan to stifle the church either by destroying from without or through deceitful charismatic outpourings, he devised another tactic. This tactic was not a new one, as can be found in biblical and early military history. The strategy was to defeat an enemy by destroying the leader.

The annual convention of the Association of Evangelical Churches of the Caribbean was held in Montería in January, 1965. Some old differences had been reconciled and an air of expectancy prevailed when elections were held for the Administrative Committee to oversee the work for the coming year.

The nominating committee presented its slate of suggested officers and representatives, proposing one name for each post and leaving the assembly at liberty to nominate others from the floor. Overwhelming agreement was expressed that this was an ideal slate. A white ballot was cast by the assembly, with no alternative nominations being offered.

The president was a veteran of twenty-seven years in the pastorate. He had been instrumental in opening the work in this area of Colombia and was the spiritual father of many of the present church leaders. The vice-president was a man of spiritual

depth who had led his church in unusual growth and development of lay leadership. The secretary, a young man with seminary and some university training, was a high school professor and part-time pastor. The treasurer was an energetic pastor with training in bookkeeping and had previously served as president of the Administrative Committee. The lay leaders who served as representatives of different geographical areas were likewise well chosen. As the young church matured, promising leadership was developing. The year was off to an excellent start.

One day in July of that year I received an urgent letter from one of the churches, accusing their pastor of adultery. They asked me to come and advise them. The pastor was one of the officers of the Administrative Committee, so they did not feel they could appeal through the Committee. I carried no authority in the church Association but agreed to go as a brother in Christ to counsel in any way possible. I called one of the other officers and asked him to accompany me to that church.

We met there the following morning and investigated the charges with the elders of the church. We also talked with two women who had made complaints. In the afternoon I visited alone with the pastor. That evening we met with the elders and the pastor. Our conclusion was that the charge of adultery was not true, although the pastor had been guilty of making improper advances. We warned him of the danger of his behavior. The officer who had accompanied me recommended disciplinary action. I did not favor such a course, hoping instead that the pastor's effective ministry could be restored without suspending him. Finally, the church after hearing the confession of the pastor and his request for pardon, decided to forgive him and to grant another opportunity to prove himself. I returned to Cartagena the next day, sick at heart over his failure but glad that he had been allowed to continue.

In August, while I was in Costa Rica for a six-week period, I received a letter from Dick Boss, LAM administrative assistant in

Colombia. The letter was marked "personal and confidential." I opened it with apprehension. Dick informed me that another officer of the Administrative Committee had confessed the sin of fornication. He had been dismissed immediately from his pastoral and other responsibilities. It would have been impossible to retain him under the circumstances. The case was handled wisely, but a valuable worker was lost to the evangelical community.

In November I was called upon to go to a city where the treasurer of the Administrative Committee served as pastor. During that year a number of discrepancies had been detected in his financial reports. Some bills were unpaid; some checks bounced; some funds disappeared; other funds were misused. I spent a day with him, trying to sift the evidence and to impress upon him the grave responsibility of handling funds. Similar efforts were later made by several others, including two formal commissions named by the Administrative Committee.

By January, 1966, when the annual convention convened again, the fourth officer had resigned in protest against the unethical conduct of the three other officers. With the resignation of one officer, the dismissal of another, and clouds hanging over the other two, the Association had no leader who could speak or act with authority. The new Administrative Committee was not to be elected until the final day of the convention.

Discrepancies again became apparent in the treasurer's annual financial report to the Association. A two-day debate on the floor followed, during which the problem was aired publicly. The treasurer had refused to respond to exhortations of individuals, of two commissions, and of his own church which, although it had warned him, failed to take any decisive action.

After two days of cross-examination, and with the indisputable evidence of his mishandling of funds, the convention voted unanimously, less one vote, to suspend the treasurer from the pastorate. The discipline was to last for one year from the date of

his repentance. But he refused to repent, and within a few days moved to another part of the country.

In February, 1966, I was again out of the country on Mission duties when Dick Boss wrote to inform me of the next tragedy. The pastor accused in July of indiscreet behavior had failed to rectify his conduct. Now the complaints had forced the new Administrative Committee and the church to take more drastic action. The pastor was placed under two months of discipline.

His church suffered deeply. He had lost his moral authority, in spite of long years of leadership. Even when he returned to his pastorate, he could not regain the respect which he had once enjoyed. By the end of 1966 he resigned and left to work in another country, where God graciously restored him to an effective ministry. His former church called a new pastor.

About the same time another veteran pastor was heading for trouble. Certain shortcomings in his ministry and conduct were perceived. Satan was not through with his attacks on the church leaders.

In July, 1966, the president of the church Association asked me to meet with him and officers of the church pastored by this man. The purpose was to deal lovingly, as brothers in Christ, with a fellow worker about several weaknesses: his carelessness with the truth, a negative attitude toward the pastorate, conduct unbecoming to a pastor, and an air of criticism which was damaging his relationships. We spent three and a half hours with him that day.

Much to our dismay, the pastor rejected every charge and every attempt to help him. The meeting ended in failure, as far as we could judge. Subsequent months proved we were right, for his ministry degenerated rapidly.

In October the church, with the cooperation of the Administrative Committee, placed the pastor under discipline for untruthfulness, unethical conduct, and a critical and negative atti-

tude. His failure to respond positively to the discipline finally led to his removal in January, 1967, from official relationship to the Association as a pastor.

At the beginning of 1966 there had been six ordained pastors in the Association besides a large number of lay leaders and unordained workers. During the year, as we have seen, three of these pastors left. In December economic reasons forced a fourth to resign from his church.

There remained two ordained men, Roberto Calderón and Ricardo Vélez. The latter has been mentioned in Chapter 9 as having led some refugees into the San Jorge River area. Ricardo had shown real progress in his pastoral ministry, and the believers in a vast rural area were indebted to him for his spiritual counsel. It seemed probable that he would be elected president of the Administrative Committee for 1967, since the constitution requires that the president be ordained, and the only other ordained man had been president the previous year.

Then, on January 2, 1967, I received a jolting telephone call from William Gyatt, LAM missionary in Sincelejo. He informed me that Ricardo Vélez had been traveling on a bus that morning between Montelíbano and Sincelejo. The bus had a serious accident with a large truck, and twelve people died, including Ricardo Vélez! His widow was left with seven children ranging in age from sixteen years to six months.

Ricardo was buried the next day in Montelíbano, where he had been serving as pastor.

As we contemplated these tragic losses, we were forced to ask how had we failed these men? What could have been done to prevent some of the losses? What was the Lord trying to say to us in all of this?

A first point to be noted was that these pastors were on the front lines. They were in the pitched battle between the forces of

evil and the forces of good. In any battle some on the front lines are bound to fall. It is all too easy to sit behind the lines in relative ease and comfort and to belittle those who either fall in battle or return wounded and maimed. Some of these pastors were victims of fierce battle, and it is not my intention to criticize them. I know something of the struggles they faced, and the surprising thing is not that they fell but that more didn't fall with them.

In Spanish there is a proverb which says, "*Las caídas enseñan al jinete*," which can be freely translated, "The horseman learns from his falls." To change the analogy from warfare to physical growth, as a child grows and learns to walk, he falls, struggles to his feet, staggers a few more steps, falls again, rises, and continues his struggle. The emerging church in northern Colombia was learning from the failures of those who were wounded on the battle line. The process of maturing is never easy, but if the lessons can be learned, the mature person or church is stronger for the experience.

One lesson that stood out was that no amount of experience in walking with the Lord makes a man immune from the attacks of Satan. These pastors were all veterans, most of them having spent a minimum of ten years or more in the ministry. The Adversary of the souls of men never relaxes his attacks. This served as a warning to younger men in the ministry to keep a diligent watch over their personal lives.

Another lesson was becoming evident. The Lord was forcing the church Association to reevaluate its entire structure. Ordained pastors had been almost entirely eliminated. At the same time there was a great upsurge of lay leadership. In June, 1966, a workers' retreat was held in Sincelejo for three days of spiritual refreshment. Approximately fifty national workers were present. Only five were ordained, the rest being mostly untrained in the formal sense. These were men whom God had touched with power. Men such as Victor and Gregorio Landero, Calixto

Amante, Elicer Benavides, and others were assuming the leadership in the expanding work, and God was blessing their ministry.

This was a great step forward. For too many years the church had been idling along in the rut of the ancient cleavage between clergy and laity. The laymen remained immobile so long as there was a pastor who was supposed to do the work. With the rise of the newer churches, where the laymen had been entirely responsible for their establishment and growth, the older churches came to a new realization. Why depend exclusively on the clergy, especially when there were far too few ordained pastors to serve the churches anyway? Then, with their numbers reduced, the remaining pastors began to take far more initiative in training the members of their churches. These laymen accepted their share of responsibility in evangelistic outreach and in edifying new believers. They saw for themselves the simple biblical truth that every believer is to be a witness for Christ.

Once again we could detect the hand of God turning evil into good. "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20). But the fact that God can make the wrath of man to praise Him does not dull the sting of seeing colleagues cut down by temptations of the flesh, a bus accident, or a terrorist's bullet.

“He Knows the Way That I Take”

In the midst of indescribable agony, the patriarch Job cried out, “Oh, that I knew where I might find him” (23:3). Job struggled with questions of cosmic significance as he sought to find God and to understand His ways with man. But much of the time he could not comprehend God or His ways. “God has . . . closed his net about me. . . . He has walled up my way, so that I cannot pass, and he has set darkness upon my paths. . . . He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone” (19:6, 8, 10).

There were many times when the church in Colombia felt this way. So did I. Had God in anger “shut up his compassion”? Were His promises “at an end for all time”? Why was Ernie Fowler shot down so brutally? Why did Rafael Yépes die so suddenly in El Carmen in the midst of great turmoil in the church? Why was Ricardo Vélez’s life cut off just as he was rising to the crest of church leadership? Who touched these men? Was it Satan? If so, why did God permit it? Was it God? If so, was it punishment for sin, as some inferred in the case of Rafael Yépes? Or, as in the case

of Job, did God have some hidden purposes which He was not revealing to His people?

Other questions came also. What constitutes the "blessing of God"? Does it mean outward results? If so, Victor Landero was apparently blessed of God, but Ernie Fowler never knew that blessing. If this be true, then what are the prerequisites to receive that blessing? To be blessed of God should a man own a brothel, cohabit with three women at the same time, live a life of general profligacy, and then be converted? Would everything he touches then turn to spiritual gold? But what of the man who for thirty-two years walks with the Lord faithfully, humbly, and without pomp or outward results? Apparently he ends up buried in a shallow grave on a lonely mountainside!

Again Job spoke for many of us in these trials. "Lo, he passes by me, and I see him not; he moves on, but I do not perceive him. Behold, he snatches away; who can hinder him? Who will say to him, 'What doest thou?'" (9:11-12).

What right did we have to ask God for explanations of what He was doing with and in His people? When God finally spoke to Job out of the whirlwind, He never answered any of the questions which Job and his friends had raised. Rather, He simply asked more questions which Job could not answer. "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? . . . Have you commanded the morning since your days began . . . ? . . . Have the gates of death been revealed to you . . . ? . . . Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth . . . ? . . . Can you send forth lightnings, that they may go . . . ? . . . Do you give the horse his might? . . . Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook?" (38-41).

God then struck to the heart of the matter when He asked, "Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified?" (40:8). Did Job have any right to condemn God, just because he couldn't understand God's ways?

Whatever the answers to the myriad questions raised by suffering and failure, by darkness in the life of His people, and by the apparent absence of God from the scene, we had no right to condemn God for injustice.

Job, in groping for God, cried out, "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand I seek him, but I cannot behold him; I turn to the right hand, but I cannot see him." How desperately hopeless can a man get? Then Job saw a great truth. "But *he* knows the way that *I* take; when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (23:8-10). Even when Job could not find God on any side, he grasped the truth that *God* could find *him*. God knew exactly where Job was all along. He never lost sight of His suffering child.

And so it was in Colombia. God looked down with tender mercies on His suffering people. Many times we felt abandoned and desolate. But God knew exactly what was transpiring. He did not always give the answers, but He met our needs.

Hundreds of years after the Book of Job was written, the apostle James wrote, "You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful" (5:11). Yes, in hindsight one can see what God was doing as He took one of His children through the fire. The fact that the purposes were hidden from Job at the time of his suffering does not mean that God had no purpose.

One of God's purposes in Colombia has already become abundantly clear. During the early 1960's the church in Colombia was listening with increasing interest to reports of Evangelism-in-Depth. This concept of Kenneth Strachan's for the total mobilization of the church was becoming increasingly effective in other Latin American republics. As Colombians heard of what God was doing in these countries, their first reaction was: "But

Colombia isn't ready for this type of program yet. There are too many restrictions, too many problems."

However, as Christians began to analyze what had happened in the past decade, it became evident that this was all part of God's preparations for a great forward movement. Persecution had left the church purged of weak elements and united in spirit. Believers had been scattered abroad in witness. Leaders had been lost, so laymen had been forced to take the lead. Confusion over charismatic problems had driven the church into depths of Bible study it had not known before.

Leaders of the Colombian church began to realize that God was paving the way for utilizing the unity and lay witness which had sprung up during these years. Together they sought the will of God and finally decided that 1968 should be the year for a united witness throughout the country in a movement of Evangelism-in-Depth. Two years were spent in preparatory work. A national committee was formed. Prayer cells were organized. Commitments were made by the large majority of the church bodies in the country to cooperate with personnel and finances. And the Latin America Mission was formally invited to provide a team of advisers.

The entire nation of nineteen million people was divided into three geographical zones, Atlantic, Central, and Pacific, with twenty-three regions as subdivisions of the zones. Zonal and regional coordinators were placed in strategic cities to coordinate activities in their area. A total of approximately seven hundred and thirty-eight local churches representing some twenty denominations joined forces in this outreach.

A goal of five thousand prayer cells to be formed throughout the country was set, but this was soon passed, and a new goal of seven thousand was set. During the months of February and March, 1968, twenty-eight regional training institutes were held to train over fifteen hundred leaders. These in turn trained dur-

ing April, May, and June approximately thirty thousand believers in the local churches for personal witness and follow-up of new believers.

Nation-wide visitation began on Sunday, June 2, when it was estimated that about twenty-one thousand Christians went door-to-door to visit one hundred and forty-three thousand homes, distributing nearly half a million tracts and Scripture portions, and speaking briefly and earnestly of Christ. This phase of the program continued throughout the succeeding months as other special activities began.

Local evangelistic campaigns were followed by larger regional campaigns. Simultaneously, efforts were directed toward presenting Christ to specialized groups such as children, youth, professional men, women, and students. Literacy campaigns and Good Will Caravans to give medical and material help were conducted in needy rural areas.

By unplanned coincidence the Roman Catholic Church also decided to hold its thirty-ninth International Eucharistic Congress in Bogotá during the month of August, climaxed by the visit of Pope Paul VI, the first papal visit to Latin America in history. By way of preparation for the Congress the Roman Catholic Church held what were called *Asambleas Familiares* throughout the country. These were basically neighborhood Bible studies held in private homes. A portion of Scripture was assigned, a message from the bishop of the area was given over the radio, and those gathered in a home then discussed the topic. Evangelicals were invited to participate, and they did so, at first with misgivings but then with enthusiasm. Here was an opportunity to sit down with their Catholic neighbors and friends to study the Word of God together and discover what it had to say to them. Never before in memory had such a thing happened in Colombia.

While some had feared that the Eucharistic Congress might cause friction during Evangelism-in-Depth, actually it provided

new opportunities for witness to the Scriptures and to salvation through faith in Christ alone.

During the Evangelism-in-Depth movement I spent several weeks traveling in the areas where the gospel had been spreading so rapidly in recent years. In the San Jorge River area a political leader had calculated that 70 per cent of the population of the region were now evangelicals. I quoted this to a farmer on the Cauca River in northern Antioquia. Although he was not a believer himself, he responded quickly by saying, "I can believe that easily. In fact, I would go so far as to say that in Cauca River area *eighty* per cent of the people are now evangelicals."

In the town of Puerto Libertador, where Victor Landero was now pastoring, his brother Gregorio was invited to be the special preacher during Easter week. So great was the attendance at the services, the crowds sometimes numbering up to twelve hundred people, that the local priest finally gave up his own Holy Week services. He announced over the loudspeaker from the Catholic Church on the main plaza, "If you are not coming to the Catholic Church during this Holy Week, at least go to the Evangelical Church, where you will hear the gospel." On Good Friday he canceled the traditional procession and attended the evangelical service himself, congratulating Gregorio afterward for the faithful preaching of the gospel.

The full story of Evangelism-in-Depth in Colombia must be told elsewhere, but this book would not be complete without a brief reference to this united nation-wide effort. The long years of suffering and confusion were being capped by the greatest advance for the gospel in the history of that land.

I do not expect to understand many of the problems raised in these pages until I meet the Lord face to face. But already, as in the case of Job, we can "see the purpose of the Lord" to some small degree in Colombia. As I think of my brethren there with whom I have worked and prayed in the midst of their agonies

and growing pains, I am confident of one thing: "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

With this I must be content.

God's ways had not always been easy. The darkness had often been deep, the suffering intense, the unanswered questions many. But in the midst of all of this, God knew the way His people were taking. And as they passed through the fire, He was bringing them forth as gold.

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The author: DAVID M. HOWARD has served as a missionary to Colombia and to Costa Rica and as Assistant General Director of the Latin America Mission. He is currently on a three-year loan by the LAM to Intervarsity Christian Fellowship as missionary director.

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